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NO. 36
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THE VAULT OF HORROR[®]

FEATURING...



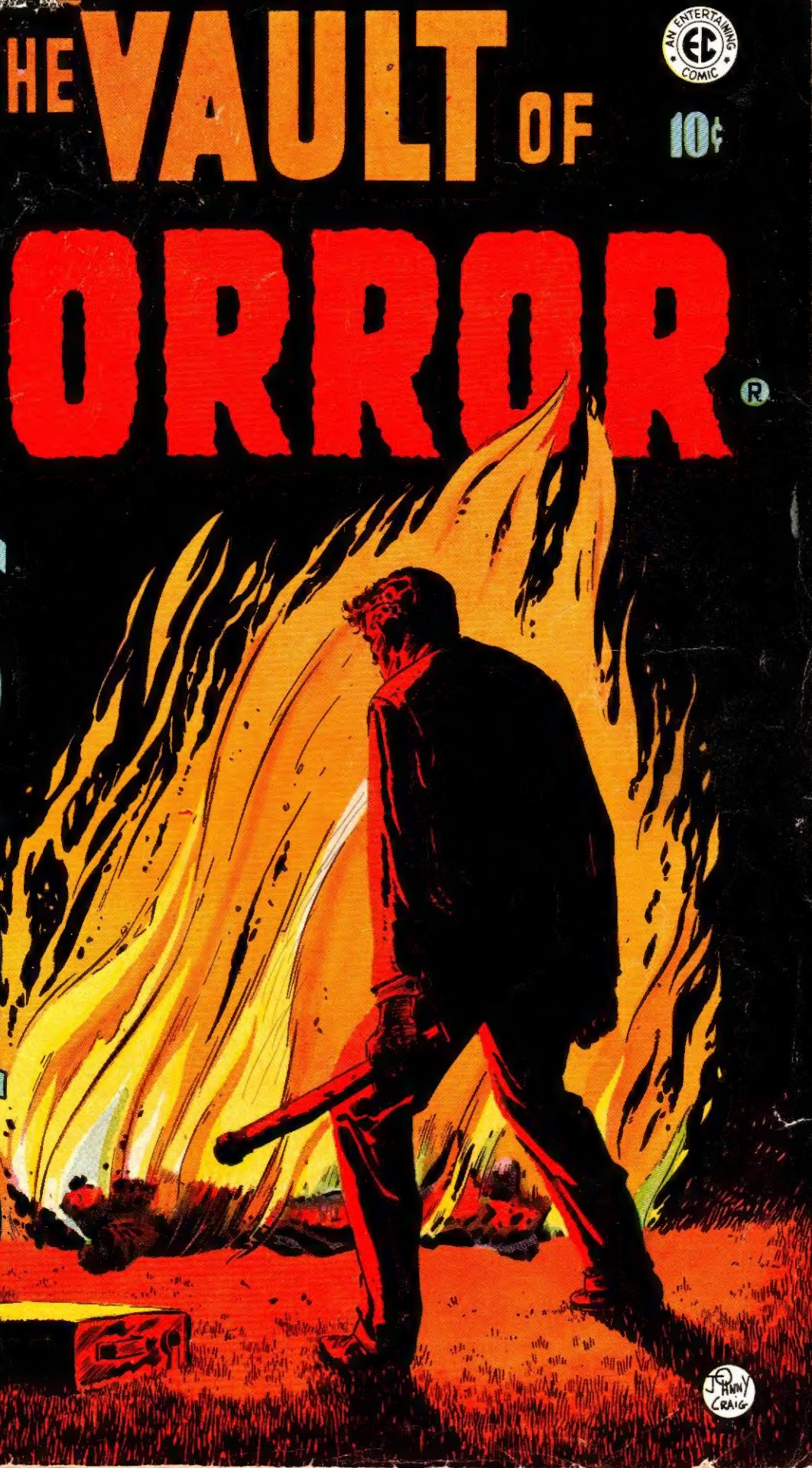
THE VAULT-KEEPER



THE CRYPT-KEEPER



THE OLD WITCH



J. HENRY
CRAIG

I Dreamed I Went to a Fraternity Smoker in my **PANIC MAGAZINE!**



I WAS UPLIFTED FROM THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR BY THIS REVEALING EXPERIENCE! I LAUGHED SO HARD I ALMOST BUST THE BINDING! I WAS THE CENTER OF ATTRACTION... THE STAR. EVERYBODY WANTED TO DANCE WITH ME! I WAS RUSHED! SO BE POPULAR LIKE ME! WEAR **PANIC!** RUN DOWN AND GET INTO YOUR COPY AT YOUR LOCAL NEWSSTAND. IF YOU'RE THE SHY TYPE AND WOULD RATHER DRESS AT HOME, THEN YOU CAN SUBSCRIBE BY FILLING OUT THIS COUPON AND MAILING TO:

THE PANICKY EDITORS OF:
PANIC
ROOM 106
225 LAFAYETTE ST.
N.Y.C., 12, N.Y.

PLEASE SEND ME THE NEXT 8 ISSUES OF **PANIC** FOR WHICH I ENCLOSE ONE DOLLAR (\$1.00)

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THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! WELL, HERE I AM AGAIN, KIDDIES, WITH ANOTHER REVOLTING YARN REEKING WITH *FEAR*, OOZING WITH *SUSPENSE*, CRAMMED WITH *TENSION*, OVERFLOWING WITH *MOOD*, *ATMOSPHERE* AND SHEER *TERROR*! YES, HERE IS A TALE THAT SEEMS TO HAVE *EVERYTHING*! SO PULL UP A *GRUD-COVERED GRAVESTONE* AND I'LL TELL YOU THE EXCITING STORY FROM THE *VAULT*, CALLED...

TWIN BILL!



LARRY BANNISTER PRESSED BACK DEEPER INTO THE CORNER, UNTIL THE WALL-BEAM CUT INTO HIS SPINE. HE SWIPED WITH HIS COAT-SLEEVE AT THE PERSPIRATION RUNNING DOWN INTO HIS EYES, TIGHTENED HIS GRIP ON THE COLT .38! HIS HANDS WERE SLIMEY-WET INSIDE HIS GLOVES, HIS LIPS FELT SWOLLEN AND PARCHED TO HIS FLICKING TONGUE. THIS WAS IT! ONLY A FEW MORE MINUTES AND IT WOULD BE ALL OVER! WHERE WERE THEY? WHY DID THEY TAKE SO LONG?

JOHN
CRANE

©

HE WAITED, SURROUNDED BY THE SILENCE, THE DARKNESS... AND HE REMEMBERED HOW HE HAD PEERED INTO THIS VERY ROOM TWO AGES-~~LONG~~ WEEKS AGO, WATCHING A MAN AND WOMAN IN THE THROES OF PASSION, SWEARING THEIR UNDYING LOVE. AND THE WOMAN WAS HIS **WIFE!**



HE REMEMBERED HOW CAREFULLY SHE HAD TRIED TO HIDE THE FACT THAT SHE HAD A LOVER, BUT HE HADN'T BEEN FOOLED! SHARON HADN'T BEEN CLEVER ENOUGH! AND AS HE HAD LISTENED TO THEIR WARM, MELTING MURMURINGS, HE CHUCKLED VICIOUSLY, FINGERING THE TRIGGER OF HIS AUTOMATIC...



SHE THOUGHT HE HAD LEFT ON A BUSINESS TRIP AND, AS AN ALIBI FOR HIM, IT WAS PERFECT! HE REMEMBERED THE FRIGHTENED, GUILTY FACES STARING AT HIM IN THE DIM LIGHT...



LARRY!

@!wXx!X
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!?

YOU DIDN'T THINK I *KNEW* ABOUT YOU TWO, EH? YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE REAL CLEVER, EH?

A GUN COULD SPEAK A STRONG LANGUAGE AND THEY HAD KNOWN IT! QUIETLY, ALMOST DEFIANTLY, THEY HAD OBEYED HIS EVERY ORDER, GATHERING ALL HIS WIFE'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS... ANYTHING THAT WOULD LEAVE A TRACE...



WHY... WHY DO WE NEED THESE SHOVELS?

YOU'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH, SHARON! YOU AND YOUR LOVER WILL *BOTH* FIND OUT! NOW WE'RE GOING FOR A WALK!

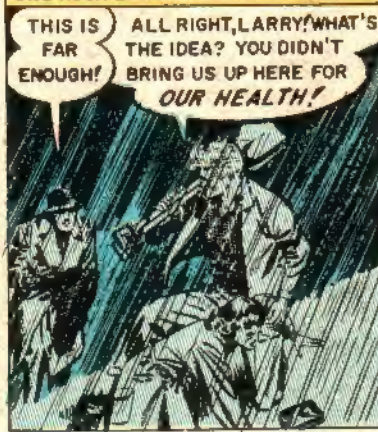
HE REMEMBERED THE QUESTIONING GLANCE THAT HAD PASSED BETWEEN THEM. THEIR SILENT DETERMINATION NOT TO SHOW HIM THEIR FEAR...



WHERE ARE WE GOING?

UP! UP THROUGH THE WOODS!

THE ELEMENTS ALL BUT RAVAGED THE EARTH IN THEIR FURY AS THE TRIO GRIMLY STRUGGLED UPWARD! ONE HOUR LATER THEY STOPPED...



THIS IS FAR ENOUGH!

ALL RIGHT, LARRY! WHAT'S THE IDEA? YOU DIDN'T BRING US UP HERE FOR *OUR* HEALTH!

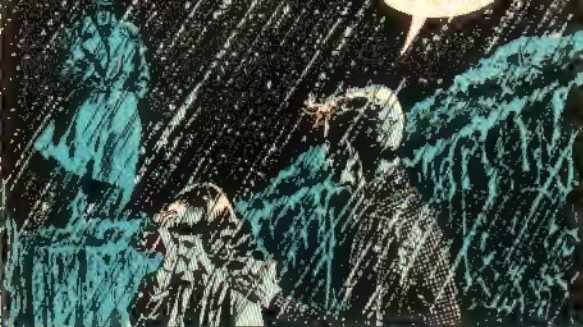
JUST PICK UP THOSE SHOVELS... AND DIG!



AS THE HOURS CRAWLED BY, THE SHOVELS SUNK DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE SODDEN EARTH, AND IN THE FLASHES OF LIGHTNING, THE TWO LOVERS LABORED HEAVILY...

ALL RIGHT! THAT'S ENOUGH! THAT'S PLENTY DEEP ENOUGH!

LISTEN HERE, LARRY! I KNOW YOU'RE SORE... ABOUT SHARON AN' ME! BUT WE LOVE EACH OTHER!



HE REMEMBERED HOW THEY HAD TALKED, TRYING SO DESPERATELY TO MAINTAIN THEIR BRAVERY...

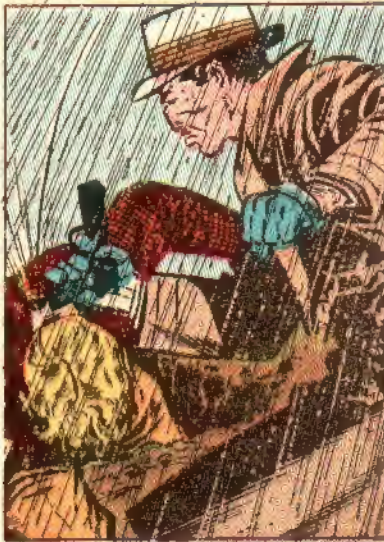
YOU AND I WERE NEVER IN LOVE, LARRY! AND IF YOU HAD GIVEN ME THE DIVORCE I WANTED, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED! WE WANT TO BE TOGETHER, THAT'S ALL!

SURE! SHARON AND I WERE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER! YOU CAN'T KEEP US APART, SO WHAT'S THE POINT TO ALL THIS?



DON'T ACT DUMB! YOU KNOW WHAT THE SCORE IS, JUST AS I DO! I'M GOING TO LET YOU BE TOGETHER... IN THE GRAVE YOU JUST FINISHED DIGGING!

WHY, YOU CRAZY... THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK!



HE HAD WATCHED HIS WIFE'S LOVER FALL BACK, SPRAWL AWKWARDLY IN THE PIT. SHARON FELL TO HIS SIDE, CRYING NOW, PLEADING FOR HIM TO WAKE UP. AND HE RECALLED HOW HE HAD SHOVED THE GUN IN HIS COAT POCKET, HOW HE HAD SNATCHED UP THE SHOVEL AND BEGUN HEAPING THE DIRT ON TOP OF THE TWO BODIES...

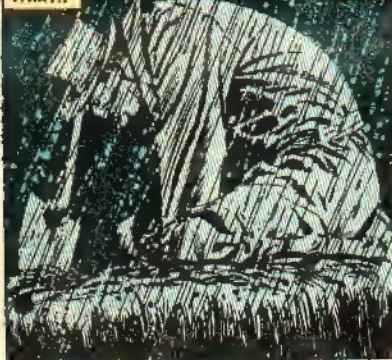


HE REMEMBERED THAT SHE HADN'T EVEN TRIED TO ESCAPE! SHE HAD REMAINED MOTIONLESS, HER ARMS AROUND HER LOVER, CRYING HOPELESSLY... HADN'T EVEN TRIED TO ESCAPE!

MEANT FOR EACH OTHER, EH? YOU'LL BE TOGETHER... FOREVER!! YOU HEAR? I SAID FOREVER!



WHEN HIS TOWERING RAGE HAD SUBSIDED, HE HAD SLUMPED TO HIS KNEES ON THE MOUND, HIS HANDS PRESSED DEEPLY IN THE MOIST, BLACK DIRT. HE SHUT HIS EYES, TRIED NOT TO HEAR THE MUFFLED CRIES FROM BENEATH HIM...



IN A WHILE, HE HAD RISEN WEARILY TO HIS FEET AND STARTED BACK TO THE LODGE. HIS WRATH HAD LEFT HIM... AND IN ITS PLACE CREPT A FEELING OF APPREHENSION...



...AND AS HE STUMBLED THROUGH THE WOODS, THERE SEEMED TO FOLLOW BEHIND HIM ON THE WIND, MOURNFUL WAILS THAT SENT CHILLS UP HIS BACK AND SPED HIM FASTER AWAY...



HIS APPREHENSION HAD TURNED TO FEAR, AND HIS FEAR ALMOST TO PANIC! HE BRUSHED FRANTICALLY THROUGH THE TREES, JUMPED AT EVERY SCURRYING SOUND HE HEARD ABOVE THE ANGRY THUNDER CLASHES, TRIPPED AND FELL HEADLONG TIME AFTER TIME...



HE HAD SCRABBLED DOWNWARD ALMOST BLINDLY, AND THE DENSE BLACKNESS OF THE FOREST SURROUNDED, ENVELOPED, TRIED LIKE A LIVING THING TO HALT HIS ESCAPE. THE LIGHTNING'S FURY SLASHED AT HIM, THE THUNDER CANNONADED HIS EARS, AS HE SLAMMED AGAIN AND AGAIN INTO TREES VEILED AND ALL BUT INVISIBLE BY THE RAIN AND THE NIGHT...



AND THEN HE HAD REACHED THE LODGE! AND THE CLEARING! AND WITH A CRY IN HIS THROAT HE SAW HIS CAR... THE CAR THAT WOULD TAKE HIM AWAY FROM THIS HORRIBLE MADNESS!



HE REMEMBERED HOW GRATEFULLY HE HAD CLAMBERED INTO THE CAR, SLID BEHIND THE WHEEL AND SLAMMED THE DOOR! HE REMEMBERED GULPING GREAT MOUTHFULS OF AIR, PRESSING HIS CHEST TO RELIEVE THE POUNDING PAIN, SEEING IN THE DEADLY LIGHTNING FLASHES THE HECTIC RIVERS STREAMING DOWN THE WINDSHIELD! HE FUMBLING THE KEY INTO THE IGNITION... PRESSED THE STARTER.....**NOTHING!**



HE FELT THE PANIC SETTING IN AND HE STOMPED THE STARTER AGAIN... AGAIN! AGAIN! AGAIN AND AGAIN!



OH, GOOD GOD... THE...THE BATTERY'S DEAD!

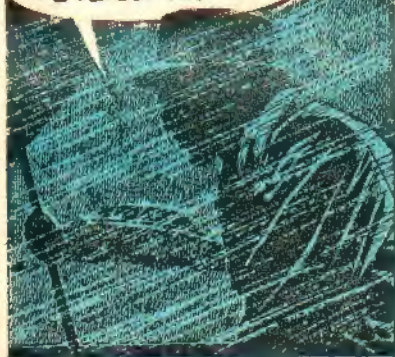
HE HAD TO GET BACK TO THE CITY! IN THE SHADOWS OF THE HUNTING LODGE HE SAW THEIR CAR! HE COULD USE *THEIR* BATTERY TO GET AWAY! HE RACED OVER, THREW UP THE HOOD.



AH! HERE IT IS!

ULP! I...I CAN'T USE THIS BATTERY! IT'S NOT POWERFUL ENOUGH!

THIS CAR HAS ONLY A *SIX-VOLT* BATTERY! AND *MY* CAR USES A *TWELVE-VOLT SYSTEM*! THIS SIX-VOLT JOB WOULDN'T BUDGE MY STARTER AN *INCH*! BUT I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE! I'VE GOT TO!



DESPERATELY, HE OPENED THE CAR DOOR AND WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF SAW THE CAR KEYS HANGING LIMPLY IN THE IGNITION SLOT. HE SLID INTO THE CAR...



THIS IS MY ONLY CHANCE! I'LL HAVE TO BRING A NEW BATTERY BACK BEFORE I CAN GET MY CAR OUT OF HERE!

HE REMEMBERED HOW HE HAD SPED SO MADLY BACK TO THE CITY AND PARKED THE CAR ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN. HE REMEMBERED PHONING THE POLICE ABOUT HIS WIFE'S DISAPPEARANCE...AND THE QUESTIONS ABOUT HER THEY ASKED. HE RECALLED HOW HE PRETENDED TO BE SO CALM, HOW HE MAINTAINED THE FRONT OF EVERYDAY BUSINESS ROUTINE, WHILE DEEP INSIDE HE WAS TORN TO SHREDS, WORRYING WHETHER HIS CAR WOULD BE DISCOVERED...



TWO WEEKS HAD PASSED BEFORE HE HAD A CHANCE TO RETURN TO THE LODGE! HE HAD DRIVEN BACK TONIGHT, IN THE BORROWED CAR... A BRAND NEW TWELVE-VOLT BATTERY SITTING PATIENTLY ON THE FLOOR...

TWO WEEKS! NO ONE'S FOUND MY CAR OR THEM! IF SOMEONE *HAD*, I CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE HEARD OF IT BY *THIS* TIME! @!!* *!!! THOUGHT THOSE MISSING PERSONS COPS WOULD *NEVER* STOP ASKING ME QUESTIONS!



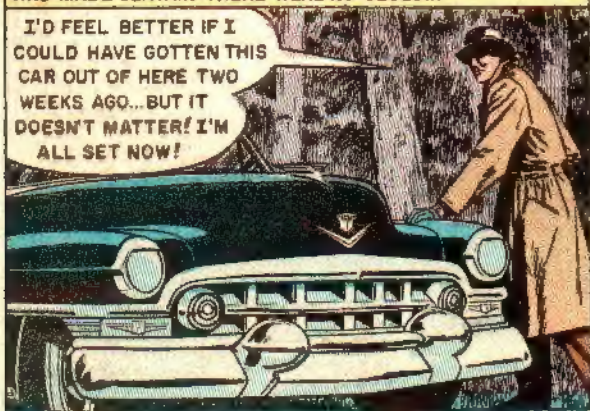
HE HAD MADE GOOD TIME TONIGHT! IT HAD BEEN ONLY A LITTLE AFTER MIDNIGHT WHEN HE BRAKED THE CAR BESIDE THE LODGE AND GOT OUT! IT HAD BEEN SO...SO *QUIET!* SO DEATHLY *STILL!* SAVE FOR THE RUSTLING OF LEAVES AND AN OCCASSIONAL THREATENING GROWL OF THUNDER, HE COULDN'T HEAR A SOUND...



THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE WILLIES! I BETTER GET TO WORK ON THAT BATTERY!

IT HADN'T TAKEN LONG TO INSTALL THE NEW BATTERY IN HIS CAR, BUT THE NOISES HE MADE WHILE DOING SO SEEMED TO ECHO FOR MILES IN THE UNEARTHLY SILENCE! HE HAD WIPED THE LOVER'S CAR OF ALL HIS FINGERPRINTS, HAD MADE CERTAIN THERE WERE NO CLUES...

I'D FEEL BETTER IF I COULD HAVE GOTTEN THIS CAR OUT OF HERE TWO WEEKS AGO...BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER! I'M ALL SET NOW!



HE HAD SLIPPED QUICKLY BEHIND THE WHEEL, BLANCED FURTIVELY AROUND WHILE HIS HANDS SEARCHED THROUGH HIS POCKETS FOR THE IGNITION KEY! NERVOUSLY AT FIRST... THEN FRANTICALLY... THEN **DESPERATELY!**

NO! OH NO! HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID!? I FORGOT TO BRING THE CAR KEYS!!



BLAST IT! BLAST IT! I CAN'T LEAVE THE CAR HERE ANY LONGER! THERE **MUST** BE A WAY! THERE **MUST** BE...

WAIT! I'VE STILL GOT A CHANCE! ONE LAST, LOUSY CHANCE!



SHARON HAD A SET OF CAR KEYS... KEPT THEM IN HER PURSE! AND I BURIED THE PURSE WITH HER! I HAVE NO OTHER CHOICE! I'VE GOT TO DIG UP THOSE KEYS!

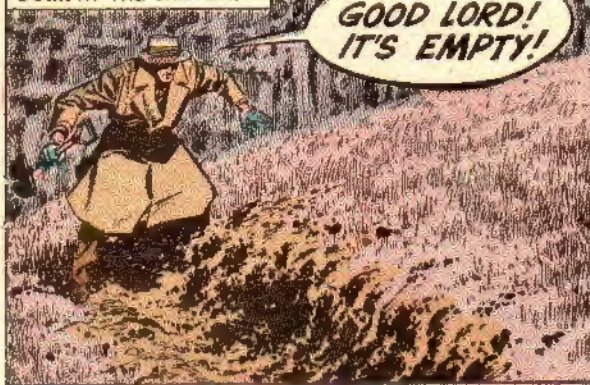


HE HAD STARTED TO TREMBLE THEN. HE KNEW THAT AFTER TWO WEEKS, THE BODIES WOULD HAVE DECAYED. HE HADN'T LIKED THE IDEA ONE BIT!



THE SKY HAD BECOME MORE THREATENING AS HE CLIMBED LABORIOUSLY UPWARD. HE PRAYED IT WOULD NOT STORM, A CLOUDBURST LIKE THE LAST ONE WOULD SHATTER HIS COURAGE COMPLETELY! HE WAS WORKING ONLY ON SHEER NERVE **NOW!** AN ETERNITY ENDED AS HE STARED DOWN AT THE GRAVE...

GOOD LORD! IT'S EMPTY!



HE REMEMBERED HOW A MILLION HORRIBLE THOUGHTS HAD FLITTED THROUGH HIS MIND, HOW THE STENCH FROM THE YAWNING PIT CONVULSED HIS STOMACH! VAGUELY, HE RECALLED SNATCHING UP THE PURSE, STUTTERING AND MUMBLING MEANINGLESS, UNINTELLIGIBLE SOUNDS, GROPING THROUGH THE PURSE...

AH! HERE THEY ARE! I FOUND THEM!



HE HAD DROPPED THE PURSE, CLUTCHED THE KEYS TIGHTLY TO HIS CHEST. THE FIRST WAVE OF PANIC HAD PASSED...

THEY *COULDN'T* HAVE BEEN FOUND! I WOULD'VE BEEN TOLD! THERE'S ONLY ONE ROAD TO THE LODGE AND I WOULD HAVE SEEN ANYONE...*NO!* THEY'RE ALIVE! THEY MUST HAVE DUG THEIR WAY OUT RIGHT AFTER I LEFT! AND THEY'VE BEEN WAITING HERE...



HE HAD DUG INTO HIS COAT, YANKED OUT HIS AUTOMATIC, AND HE REMEMBERED THE COURAGE IT HAD GIVEN HIM! HE TURNED... STARTED BACK TO THE LODGE. IT BEGAN TO RAIN...

SURE! THEY KNEW I HAD TO COME BACK FOR MY CAR, SO THEY WAITED FOR ME! THEY WANT TO GET *EVEN!*

THEY'RE PROBABLY BACK AT THE LODGE NOW! WELL, *THIS* TIME I'LL MAKE *SURE* THEY'RE DEAD!



THE MISTY DRIZZLE HAD GRADUALLY BECOME A HEAVY RAIN... AND AS THE RAIN BECAME MORE INTENSE, HIS BRAVADO FADED! HE TURNED TO LOOK BACK! SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SKY, HE SAW THE TWO OF THEM...

AGAIN THE SHARP PANIC ENGULFED HIM, AND HE RAN! HE WANTED TO REACH THE LODGE... TO MEET THEM WITHOUT THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE TREES AND THE BLASTED RAIN! HE HAD RUN FASTER... FASTER...

THERE HAD BEEN A POWERFUL .38 IN HIS HAND, BUT SOMEHOW IT SEEMED INEFFECTUAL... ALMOST USELESS! HE HAD NO CONCRETE REASONS... BUT HIS MOUNTING FEAR WAS REASON ENOUGH...



GOOD LORD! THEY'RE BEHIND ME! I CAN'T LET THEM GET ME OUT HERE!



HE HAD REACHED THE LODGE CLEARING IN A FIT OF TERROR! HIS STUMBLING LEGS CARRIED HIM WEAKLY TO HIS CAR. HE FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR, SLUMPED TIREDLY ON THE SEAT WHILE HIS TREMBLING HANDS HAD OPENED THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT AND GRABBED THE FLASHLIGHT THERE...

HE HAD WALKED SWIFTLY THROUGH THE TALL WET GRASS TO THE LODGE, HAD CLIMBED THE WOODEN STEPS TO THE WOODEN PORCH, HAD OPENED THE WOODEN DOOR AND STEPPED INTO THE WARM, DRY, PITCH-BLACKNESS! HE CLOSED THE DOOR, GROPED HIS WAY ACROSS THE ROOM TO A CORNER... AND WAITED...



HEH, HEH! NOW LET THEM COME FOR ME! I'M READY... I'M READY FOR THEM NOW!



HE HAD WAITED AND LISTENED TO THE RAIN WHISPERING TO THE LEAVES AND THE BLADES OF GRASS...UNTIL HE HEARD THE UNMISTAKABLE SHUFFLING, RUSTLING SOUND OF THEIR FOOTSTEPS OUTSIDE...



NOW HE PRESSED BACK DEEPER INTO THE CORNER, TIGHTENED THE GRIP ON HIS .38! THIS WAS IT! ONLY A FEW MORE MINUTES! HE HEARD THEM MOUNTING THE STEPS TO THE PORCH...



HE SWIPED AT THE PERSPIRATION WITH HIS COAT SLEEVE! LONG MINUTES PASSED, AND THEN THE DOOR CREAKED SLOWLY OPEN! AN UNBEARABLE, NAUSEATING STENCH PERVADED THE ROOM...



HE GRIPPED HIS AUTOMATIC TIGHTER STILL TO CONTROL THE SHAKING HAND! IN THE INKY BLACKNESS HE HEARD THEIR STEPS MOVING TOWARD HIM ACROSS THE ROOM... CLOSER! CLOSER! AND THE HORRIBLE, PUNGENT ODOR GREW STRONGER, GAGGING HIM, AND HIS ENTIRE BODY WAS CONVULSED WITH VIOLENT SHIVERS AND HIS NERVES WERE SPLITTING FROM THE STRAIN...



HE SNAPPED ON THE FLASH-LIGHT!!



IN A SAVAGE, DESPERATE FRENZY, HE RAISED HIS GUN, BLASTED THE MONSTROSITY WITH A STACCATO OF LEAD... SAW THE SHELLS RIP AND TEAR THROUGH, SHATTERING BONE INTO FRAGMENTS, DECAYED, MAGGOTY FLESH INTO SMITHEREENS! BUT IT DIDN'T STOP... IT CAME GROPING TOWARD HIM, CLOSER AND CLOSER...



AND THEN HIS GUN CLATTERED HARMLESSLY TO THE FLOOR AND HE SCREAMED HYSTERICALLY! THE TWO-HEADED ROTTING THING ENVELOPED HIM IN AN EMBRACE OF DEATH AND THE AGONIZING, ALL-CONSUMING FIRES OF DEATH FLOODED HIS BODY! IT WAS THEN, AS HIS LIFE LEFT HIM, THAT HE REMEMBERED IT WAS HE WHO HAD PROMISED SHARON AND HER LOVER THEY WOULD BE TOGETHER FOREVER!

HEH, HEH! WELL I WISH I COULD TELL YOU *IN DETAIL* JUST WHAT SHARON AND HER LOVER *DID* TO LARRY, BUT AFTER ALL... HOW REVOLTING CAN ONE GET? LARRY SHOULD HAVE KNOWN HE COULD NEVER HAVE WON! **EVERYBODY**



KNOWS TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE! WELL, ENOUGH OF THIS LOVE-MAKING! THE CRYPT-KEEPER IS GETTING SORE SO EYES RIGHT! RIGHT? RIGHT!

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! SO NICE OF YOU FOUL FIENDS TO VISIT WITH ME AGAIN! IT'S SO HEARTWARMING TO KNOW THAT I AM NOT ALONE IN MY PLEASURE OF THE HORRORS AND GRUESOME DEEDS THAT ARE FOUND HERE IN THE *CRYPT OF TERROR*! YES, THIS IS *THE CRYPT-KEEPER*, YOUR OLD STAND-BY, BRINGING YOU ANOTHER *DEVILISH* DRAMA OF LIFE'S WICKEDNESS! I CALL THIS LITTLE SWEAT-PROVOKER...

WITCH WITCH'S WITCH!



EVERYONE IN THE TINY EUROPEAN VILLAGE OF BLUMSTADT KNEW THEY WERE COMING. A WEEK AGO ERIC HOLBEIN HAD TRAVELED TO THE CITY ON BUSINESS... AND TWO DAYS LATER HAD SENT WORD THAT HE HAD **MARRIED!** IN THE TOWN SQUARE PEOPLE HUDDLED TOGETHER WHISPERING OF THE IGNOBLE MANNER IN WHICH HE HAD TREATED ALICIA GRUENWALD TO WHOM HE HAD BEEN BETROTHED SINCE CHILDHOOD. THE TOWN WAS UTTERLY AGHAST AT THE SCANDAL...

OH, ERIC! I'M SO AFRAID! WHAT WILL THEY *THINK* OF ME?

NOW DON'T YOU WORRY, HELENA! THEY'RE SURE TO LOVE YOU. COME... LET'S GO IN.



THEY ENTERED THE HOUSE. IN THE LIVING ROOM THEY FACED A HOSTILE TRIO... HIS MOTHER, HIS EX-FIANCÉE, AND HER MOTHER!

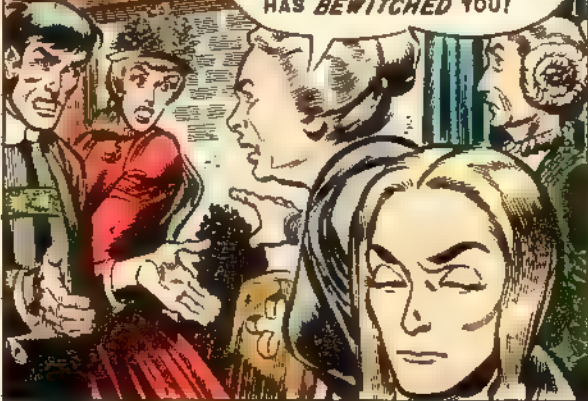
MOTHER, I WANT YOU TO MEET MY...

ERIC, HOW COULD YOU DO SUCH A THING? HAVE YOU NO HEART? NO DECENCY? DO YOU REALIZE THE SHAME AND DISGRACE YOU'VE CAUSED BY MARRYING THIS... THIS *HUSSY*!?



BUT OH, PLEASE! I *BEG* YOU! MOTHER, LISTEN...

ENOUGH! HOW YOU COULD HAVE CHOSEN THIS *CHEAP, BRAZEN SLUT* WHEN YOU COULD HAVE MARRIED *ALICIA*, IS BEYOND ME! SURELY, SHE HAS *BEWITCHED* YOU!



NONSENSE! I LOVE HELENA!

HOW CAN YOU LOVE A PERSON LIKE *HER*? YOU MUST BE OUT OF YOUR MIND!

WAIT!



ALICIA, ERIC'S EX-FIANCÉE, SPOKE...

I... I BEAR YOU NO GRUDGE, ERIC. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE HERE TODAY, BUT MY FATHER INSISTED. IT HURTS ME TO HAVE LOST YOU... BUT I WISH YOU AND HELENA ALL THE HAPPINESS I HAD HOPED FOR!

THANK YOU, ALICIA...



... HELENA... TAKE GOOD CARE OF ERIC. *LOVE* HIM ALWAYS. AND, IF YOU SHOULD NO LONGER WANT HIM... I'LL... I'LL BE WAITING! (SOB)

OH, ALICIA, I PROMISE YOU I'LL BE A *GOOD WIFE* TO ERIC! THANK YOU BEING SO UNDERSTANDING!



ALICIA'S MOTHER STARTED TO LEAVE. AND AS SHE WAS BEING HELPED ON WITH HER COAT, WHILE SHE LISTENED TO THE EXPLANATIONS OF ERIC, AND THE PROFUSE APOLOGIES OF ERIC'S MOTHER, ALICIA TURNED VEHEMENTLY TO HELENA...

I'M LEAVING NOW, YOU *HORRID LITTLE SNIP*! BUT IF YOU THINK I'M GOING TO LET YOU GET AWAY WITH MAKING A FOOL OF *ME*, YOU'RE WRONG! I'M GOING TO GET EVEN WITH YOU! I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY!



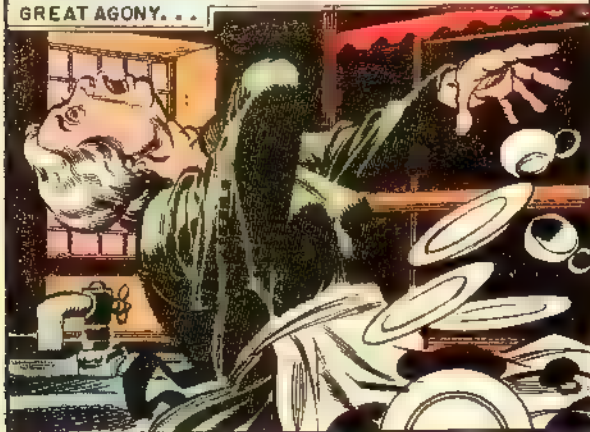
THAT NIGHT, IN THEIR ROOM, HELENA CRIED BITTERLY...

OH, ERIC! I'M SO MISERABLE! THEY *HATE* ME! THEY'RE ALL AGAINST ME! I LOVE YOU, BUT I SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE MARRIED YOU! I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE AT ALL!

THEY'LL GET USED TO IT, HELENA! JUST WAIT AND SEE!



THE TOWN HUMMED WITH MALICIOUS GOSSIP! EVERY ONE KNEW THAT ERIC'S MOTHER WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH HELENA, BUT IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING! A WEEK LATER ERIC'S MOTHER SUDDENLY DIED IN GREAT AGONY...



HELENA WAS TOO ILL TO ATTEND THE FUNERAL, BUT THE TOWNSPEOPLE ASSEMBLED THERE IN DROVES...

I HEARD SHE WAS TOO SICK TO COME! PHAH! SHE BROUGHT DEATH TO A WONDERFUL WOMAN! SHE ISN'T HERE BECAUSE SHE'S JUST A PAGAN, HEARTLESS GIRL, IF YOU ASK ME!



IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, THE RUMORS SPREAD AND GREW MORE INTENSE WITH EACH REPETITION...

YA' MEAN SHE DELIBERATELY KILLED ERIC'S MOTHER?! OF COURSE! BUT THEY CAN'T PROVE IT! SHE'S A MEAN ONE, SHE IS!



AND ONE MORNING, HER EYES STILL RED FROM TEARS, HELENA WAS VISITED BY MEMBERS OF THE TOWN'S CHURCH GROUP...

OH, IT'S SO KIND OF YOU TO VISIT! I... IF YOU DON'T MIND, THIS IS NOT A SOCIAL CALL! WE ARE HERE ONLY BECAUSE IT IS OUR DUTY!



YOUR... DUTY?

YES! IN VIEW OF ALL THE SCANDALOUS EVENTS THAT HAVE CENTERED AROUND YOU SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL HERE, WE FEEL THAT WE MUST ASK YOU NOT TO ATTEND OUR MEETINGS!



OH, BUT... PLEASE! IF YOU'LL ONLY LISTEN TO MY... THIS IS NOTHING PERSONAL, YOU UNDERSTAND, BUT TO INSURE THE MORAL CHARACTER OF OUR LITTLE CHILDREN, IT IS A NECESSITY! GOOD DAY!



TO HELENA, THE TENDER, COMFORTING WORDS OF HER HUSBAND WERE HER ONLY SOLACE. SHE WAS ALL SO HELPLESS TO STEM THE RISING TIDE OF HATE THAT WAS MUSHROOMING! IT WAS BUT A FEW DAYS LATER THAT THE CHURCH LEADER LAPSED INTO A COMA...

SHE WON'T WAKE UP! SHE SLEEPS LIKE THE DEAD! EVER SINCE ERIC BROUGHT THAT WOMAN HERE, THERE'S BEEN NOTHING BUT TROUBLE! SHE CAUSED THIS!



THE UNKNOWN CAUSE OF THE CHURCHWOMAN'S COMA GAVE RISE TO FANTASTIC STORIES BY THE SUPERSTITIOUS. AND ALICIA'S MOTHER EAGERLY DID HER SHARE OF IT...

THERE'S SOMETHING VERY STRANGE AND **EVIL** ABOUT THAT WOMAN, MARK MY WORDS! EVERYONE WHO HAS CROSSED HER PATH HAS SUFFERED **DREADFULLY!** IT'S AS IF AN **EVIL SPIRIT** WERE AT WORK!



THE WAY ERIC IS **BLIND** TO WHAT'S GOING ON, YOU'D BE SURE HE HAD A **SPELL** CAST ON HIM! THAT'S THE ONLY REASON **I** CAN SEE FOR HIS HAVING **MARRIED HER** INSTEAD OF MY POOR, BROKEN-HEARTED ALICIA! AND AS SOON AS SHE CAME HERE...**POOF!** ERIC'S MOTHER **DIED!**



...AND THEN THE LEADER OF OUR CHURCH GROUP! YOU **KNOW** WHAT HAPPENED TO **HER!** AND IT WAS RIGHT AFTER SHE VISITED THAT WOMAN! I TELL YOU THAT WOMAN HAS A **STRANGE POWER...** THE POWER OF A **WITCH!**

A **WITCH?!**

A **WITCH?!**



YES! HOW **ELSE** CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE GOINGS-ON SINCE SHE CAME HERE?! ONLY A **WITCH** CAN CAST **SPELLS!** ONLY SOMEONE WHO CONJURES UP **EVIL SPIRITS** CAN CAUSE PEOPLE TO SLEEP LIKE THE **DEAD!**

A **WITCH!**

LORD 'A **MERCY!**



SHE COMMUNES WITH THE DEVIL! BY HEAVEN, THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN I **FEAR** FOR MY **LIFE!**

WE'RE **DOOMED!** A **WITCH** BE AMONG US!



IT WAS BUT A SHORT TIME LATER THAT ALICIA'S MOTHER AND HER TERRIFIED FRIENDS WERE CROSSING THE TOWN SQUARE. SUDDENLY THEY STOPPED, TREMBLING! THEY SAW HELENA STANDING BEFORE A SHOP WINDOW ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SQUARE, AND SUDDENLY SHE TURNED. FOR A MOMENT HER GAZE RESTED ON ALICIA'S MOTHER...



...WHO PROMPTLY STAGGERED AND FELL DEAD!



DEATHLY FRIGHTENED, HELENA RAN SWIFTLY AWAY, THE SHOUTS RINGING IN HER EARS...

A WITCH! SHE'S THE DEVIL'S OWN!

SHE DID IT! WE SAW HER DO IT! SHE'S A WITCH!!

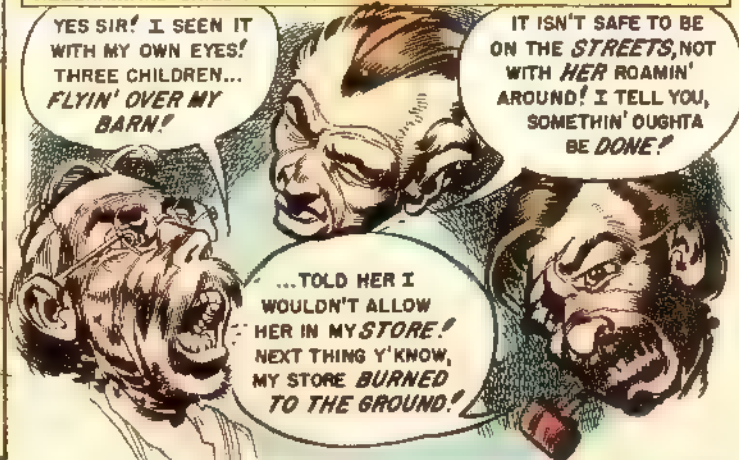


THE TOWNFOLKS' MUTTERINGS GREW IN ANGER AND FEAR! EVERY ILL FORTUNE, HOWEVER SMALL OR RIDICULOUS, WAS ATTRIBUTED TO HELENA...AND CHILDISH FANCIES BECAME HORRIBLE FACTS!

YES SIR! I SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES! THREE CHILDREN... FLYIN' OVER MY BARN!

IT ISN'T SAFE TO BE ON THE STREETS, NOT WITH HER ROAMIN' AROUND! I TELL YOU, SOMETHIN' OUGHTA BE DONE!

...TOLD HER I WOULDN'T ALLOW HER IN MY STORE! NEXT THING Y'KNOW, MY STORE BURNED TO THE GROUND!



THE ENTIRE TOWN WAS PRESENT AT THE BURIAL OF ALICIA'S MOTHER! AND AS EVERYONE KNELT IN PRAYER, ALICIA SUDDENLY LOOKED SKYWARD AND SCREAMED!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, CHILD?

I SEE HER! SHE'S COMING FOR ME! SHE WANTS TO KILL ME!



THE WITCH! I SEE THE WITCH! AAGGH! MY HEART!

GLORY BE! THE WITCH IS TRYING TO KILL HER!



DO SOMETHING! THE PAIN! SHE'S TRYING TO TEAR MY HEART OUT!

AAAAGGH!

DO SOMETHING, YOU IDIOTS! DON'T JUST STAND THERE!



WE GOT TO PUT AN END TO THIS!

KILL THE WITCH!

BURN HER! BURN THE WITCH!



THE FURY OF THE MOB FLARED AND SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE! TORCHES WERE LIT, AND AMID THE SCREAMING FRENZY OF THE MARCHING PEOPLE, SHOUTS WERE HEARD THAT HERALDED HELENA'S DOOM!



AS THE HECTIC MOB DREW CLOSE, HELENA WAS ALMOST HYSTERICAL WITH FEAR...

ERIC! THEY'VE GONE CRAZY! DON'T LET THEM GET ME, ERIC! YOU KNOW I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! ERIC! DON'T LET THEM GET ME!

DON'T WORRY, HELENA! I'LL PROTECT YOU!



AND THEN THE MOB CRASHED INTO THE HOUSE, FILLING THE ROOMS, WRECKING FURNITURE, STARTING FIRES, THROWING HER TO THE WALL...

WE HAVE YOU NOW, WITCH! YOU WON'T DO ANY MORE KILLIN'!

NO, NO! PLEASE! I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING! OH, PLEASE BELIEVE ME! ERIC! HELP ME!



GET OUT OF MY HOUSE! GET... UNGH!

BE STILL! CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT SHE'S UP TO, MAN? WHEN THIS IS OVER, YOU'LL THANK US!

NO! NO!



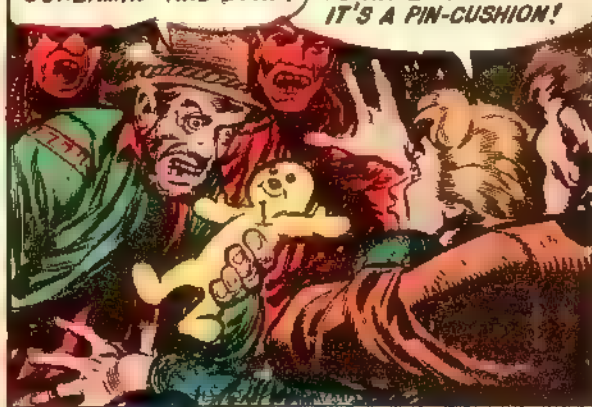
I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING! OH, GOD, MAKE THEM BELIEVE ME! I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING! PLEASE! PLEASE!

LOOK HERE! WE FOUND THIS DOLL IN THE ATTIC... WITH A PIN IN ITS HEART!



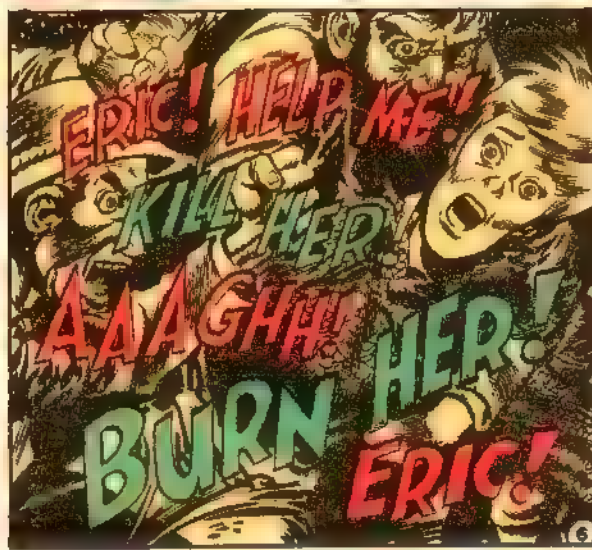
AHHA! NOW WE HAVE PROOF! THIS IS HOW YOU TRIED TO KILL ALICIA! THIS IS WHY SHE WAS SCREAMIN' AND DYIN'!

NO, NO! YOU'RE ALL WRONG! ALICIA GAVE ERIC THAT DOLL YEARS AGO! IT'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE PINS IN IT! IT'S A PIN-CUSHION!



CAN'T YOU SEE! ALICIA WAS ANGRY BECAUSE I MARRIED ERIC! SHE'S TRYING TO GET EVEN! SHE WAS ONLY FAKING! JUST PRETENDING TO BE DYING!

LIAR! KILL THE WITCH! BURN HER!!



PANDEMONIUM RACED THROUGH THE ROOM! IN THE MAD CONFUSION HELENA WAS PUMMELED AND KICKED! SHE SAW ERIC FIGHTING DESPERATELY, HEARD THE DULL BLAST OF A PISTOL! ERIC TUMBLED TO THE FLOOR...



SHE FELT HERSELF DRAGGED, SCREAMING AND CLAWING, TO THE TOWN SQUARE! THE ANGRY ROAR OF THE MOB FLOODED HER EARS AND HER ENTIRE BODY ACHED FROM COUNTLESS BLOWS! FLEETINGLY, SHE SAW THE HUGE FIRE...



THEN SUDDENLY HER STRENGTH LEFT AND SHE CEASED FIGHTING! SHE LET THEM PLACE HER ON A BARREL FOR THE CROWD TO SEE...



AT SIGHT OF HER, THE HYSTERICAL MOB ROARED EVEN LOUDER! SHE HUNG HER HEAD... COVERED HER FACE WITH HER HANDS...



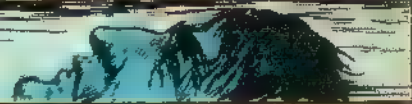
AT LENGTH SHE RAISED HER HEAD, GAZED OVER THE BOBBING FACES. SHE LIFTED HER ARMS TO THE SKY...



HEH, HEH! WITCH ALL GOES TO SHOW, YOU CAN'T BE SURE OF NOTHING! YES, HELENA REALLY *WAS* A GENUINE *WITCH*, BUT SHE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO *ACTIVE*! CASTING ALL THOSE *SPELLS* NEARLY *SPELLED* HER *DOOM*! HEH! AND POOR ERIC... HE GOT THE *SHOT* END OF IT, DIDN'T HE? WELL, *V.K.'S* AWAITING, SO TILL NEXT TIME! TA TA!



COOLER



The drop from the high stone wall jarred Scott right down to his toes; his boots crunched noisily in the snow as he began to run. For a hundred yards he zig-zagged erratically, to avoid detection, in case he'd been seen. At last he reached a grove of ice-hung trees and stopped to catch his breath. He turned quickly, his mittened hands thrashing at his arms and shoulders to keep the circulation moving. For a moment his eyes roved from one end of the huge stone wall to the other: from deep in his throat a soft whinny of satisfaction welled up. *Cragmore Prison, he whispered in triumph. The rock-pile no one ever busted out of. I made it . . . they'll never hustle ME back into that lousy cooler!*

A sudden chill made Scott's body tremble violently. He spat once, to show his contempt for Cragmore, then began to crunch across the frozen ground toward the Lake. The way he'd figured it, back there in the cooler, this was the best time to try a break-out. A little cold, perhaps . . . but when else could he cross the Lake which completely surrounded the island on which the prison stood? The first cold snap, he'd been telling himself, and the Lake would freeze over solid. The time had come . . . it must be close to zero right now!

He was crossing the dirty grey ice, warily watching the dark patches which meant water close to the surface, when he heard the alarm. They'd be searching the Lake for him in another minute, Scott realized . . . not enough time to reach the opposite shore. He was cornered, unless . . . unless

Almost directly in front of him he saw it: a jagged hole cut in the thick ice, probably by a farmer doing some illegal fishing. Carefully, inch by inch, Scott lowered himself through the hole into the frigid water. He heard the first crash of footsteps just as he disappeared completely into the gaping hole and ducked

out of sight under the heavy cover of ice shrouding the Lake

It was painfully cold, with water up to his chin and only a few inches of air between the water line and the ice sheet overhead . . . but it was his only chance. Then the crash of feet came closer, right toward him it seemed, and Scott dove deep and paddled frantically to get away from the hole. For a full minute he swam blindly underwater, then, when he thought his head would burst from the pressure, he slid upward and drew a deep breath in the tiny corridor of air between the water and the ice. Five minutes he waited in silence, listening intently. When he was sure his pursuers had gone, he began searching for the hole in the ice, so that he could climb out and get to the opposite shore

He seemed to have lost it completely . . . the jagged entrance to this watery hideout. He thrashed around in ever more hysterical circles, but the hole had somehow vanished without trace. His fists grew raw and bloody from his frenzied attempts to punch a new hole in the ice, but still there was no way out of his freezing prison

Fiery pin-points of pain began to stab at his flesh in a thousand parts of his body; his arms and legs seemed curiously numbed and useless. His last scream of horror echoed dully through the narrow corridor of sub-zero air just a second before his brain seemed to explode into a riot of white-cold icicles. Then a strange feeling of tranquility took possession of him . . . for a moment he felt warm and drowsy. Though his lips were stiff with frost he managed to smile feebly before he started slowly to slide under the water

They'll never take me back to the cooler, he thought as his body drifted downwards through the freezing water

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION, REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 288) of VAULT OF HORROR published Bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1953

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, L.L. Pub. Co. Inc., 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y., Editor, John T. Craig, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y., Managing Editor, William M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.; Business manager, Frank D. Lee, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member, must be given.) L.L. Pub. Co. Inc., 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y. Wm. M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y. J. K. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

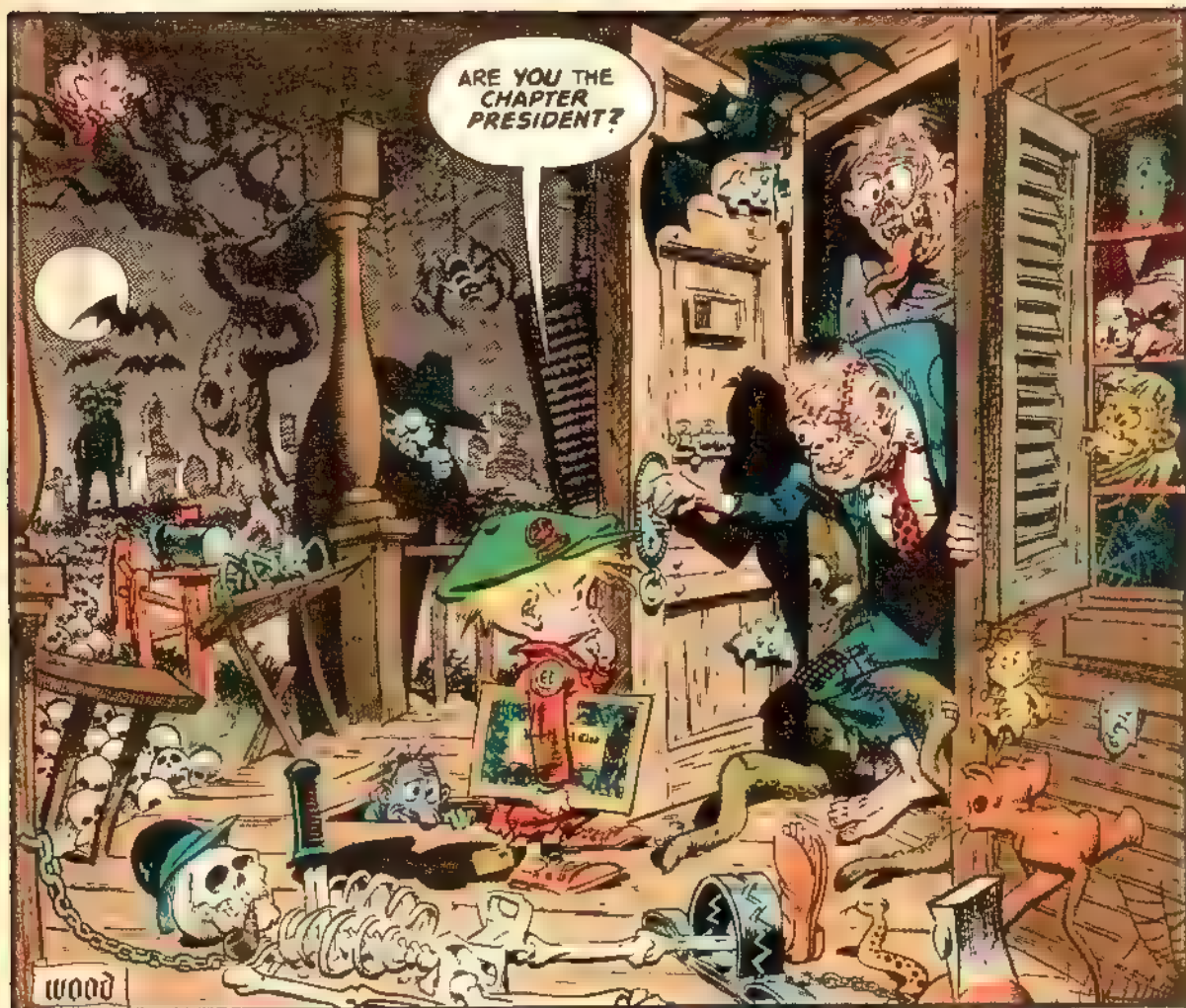
5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

(Signed) FRANK D. LEE, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1953.

Ettore De Stefano, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1954.)

[SEAL]



YOU, TOO, CAN MEET NEW FRIENDS! JOIN THE **E.C. FAN-ADDICT CLUB!**

SEND FOR YOUR **MEMBERSHIP KIT** TODAY. RECEIVE A FULL-COLOR $7\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ ILLUMINATED CERTIFICATE, A STURDY WALLET IDENTIFICATION CARD, A SNAZZY EMBROIDERED SHOULDER PATCH, AND A STUNNING ANTIQUE BRONZE-FINISH BAS-RELIEF PIN.

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FOR AN **INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP**, FILL OUT THE COUPON AND SEND IT IN, TOGETHER WITH 25¢. IF **FIVE OR MORE** OF YOU WISH TO JOIN AS AN **AUTHORIZED CHAPTER**, ENCLOSE EACH MEMBER'S NAME AND ADDRESS ALONG WITH 25¢ FOR EACH NAME, AND INDICATE THE NAME OF THE **ELECTED CHAPTER PRESIDENT**. WE WILL NOTIFY EACH PRESIDENT OF HIS CHAPTER NUMBER. EACH MEMBER, CHAPTER OR INDIVIDUAL, WILL RECEIVE HIS KIT **DIRECTLY... BY RETURN MAIL?**



THE VAULT-KEEPER'S CORNER

Heh, heh! What a laugh! Just saw the proofs of that two page spread on my idiot editor Gaines in the March issue of the new "vest-pocket" size photo mag called TOPS. What's got me snickering is the photo they got of him! What a fat slob! Rest of the issue seems entertaining enough though . . . some real cute pin-ups!

Well . . . enough of this chit-chat . . . lotta mail

Dear Vault-Keeper,

Ever since the early months of 1950, E.C. publications have been the very best obtainable. This was due to the wonderful writing, editing, and artistry in each and every E.C. mag. And during those four years, all of the editors, artists, and writers have received their share of "publicity" in the mags themselves. Not only in the readers' columns, but in the stories as well. The readers used to be able to write in and vote for their favorite story, which always gave the artists a chance for their names to be mentioned. ALL seem to have shared in the advancing and improvement of E.C. during the four years of "New Trend" mags.

But now let me get to the real point of my letter. There is an artist-writer on your staff who seems to get no credit at all. He writes his own scripts for the leads in the "Vault of Horror" and "Crime Suspense Stories" in addition to doing his artwork. Of course I'm referring to Johnny Craig. But he seems to be in exactly the same position as he was 4 years ago. Lead story, cover. Lead story, cover. This boy is top-notch, and I hope that in the near future, he'll get the recognition he really deserves.

Bill Spicer
Los Angeles Calif

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! I hope you're satisfied! This crumb Craig is now my EDITOR . . . a demotion, if I ever saw one! And now he not only draws the cover and lead story . . . but writes all four!

I enjoy reading your comics so much that I feel I must write and tell you. In this country it's so hard to get American comics that when I do get one, I prize it highly. I have managed to obtain six of your grand E.C. comics, and I would not sell them for a pound. Will you please get me a pen-pal?

Malcolm Biggs
89 Swiss Drive
Ashton Vale, Bristol
England

Ya see how lucky you are to be Americans, you ungrateful brats? YOU can get all the E.C. mags ya want! Poor Malcolm is STARVED for good literature! Go on and give him some! (The company as trustee or in any other fiduciary of each individual member, must be given.) L.L. Wm. M. Gaines, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12, N.Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities, shall be paid in full, or the proceeds of the sale of the assets of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary such trustee is acting; also the statements in the tax returns as to the circumstances and conditions under which the books of the company as trustees, hold stock as owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 month period is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and monthly.

(Signed)

Sworn to and signed

Before me this 11th day of May, 1954, at New York, N.Y.

no other . . . horror books except E.C.'s. To quote him. 'I have tried other horror books, but they irritated my skin. But when I tried yours, with the ten day test, I found yours to be THE book for me! Not only high quality paper, but the only one containing 100% chlorophyll! They're the greatest since the invention of the 'Sears and Roebuck' catalog.' How about that?

Jack Laws
San Antonio, Texas

Ya see? We're the only outfit approved by England, girls, parents, and dogs!

. . . I would like to say that your comics are the most entertaining and relaxing comics put out. My Dad used to take all my E.C.'s and burn them, then one day he happened to read one, and now fights with everyone else to get one of the few E.C.'s that are received at our newsstand.

Dave DeChaine
Paso Robles, Calif

Hmmmmmmmm!

. . . What's all the rhubarb about your E.C. comics? So what if they are the best—must you make a point of it? Cut out all the fuss. Who cares? I'm only 17 now, but I'll probably be reading them when I'm 90.

Vera Bernard
N Y C

Just keep reading them . . . and you won't live to be 90!

I picked up a horror comic the other day (I didn't buy it, just thumbed through it) to see how it compared with E.C., since they used "Suspense Stories" in their title. It had the sorriest art work and plots that I had ever seen. They also copied two of their stories from one of the stories in Haunt of Fear and one in Vault of Horror No. 26. It was even a sorry imitation. I have been saving E.C.'s for 2 years and I know every title perfectly, but one of those imitations fooled me completely because it used almost every word on an E.C. cover! It's a crime!

Larry Hawkins
Midwest City, Okla

Unfortunately, it isn't a crime, Larry! Just unethical!

As the wise Englishman said, "It's better that E.C. than that E don't C!"

Art Walker
Binghamton, N Y

Yea venly!

Commercials: WHAT . . . YOU HAVE NOT YET READ E.C.'S TWO 3-D MAGS? YOU HAVE NOT YET READ three dimensional e.c. classics OR three dimensional tales from the crypt of terror? WELL HERE'S YOUR OPPORTUNITY! Although these priceless gems originally sold on the newsstand for two bits (10¢) by purchasing the code word "E.C." in the back of a subscription to this rag . . . eight issues . . . 17 manila envelopes. Address for things like that there.

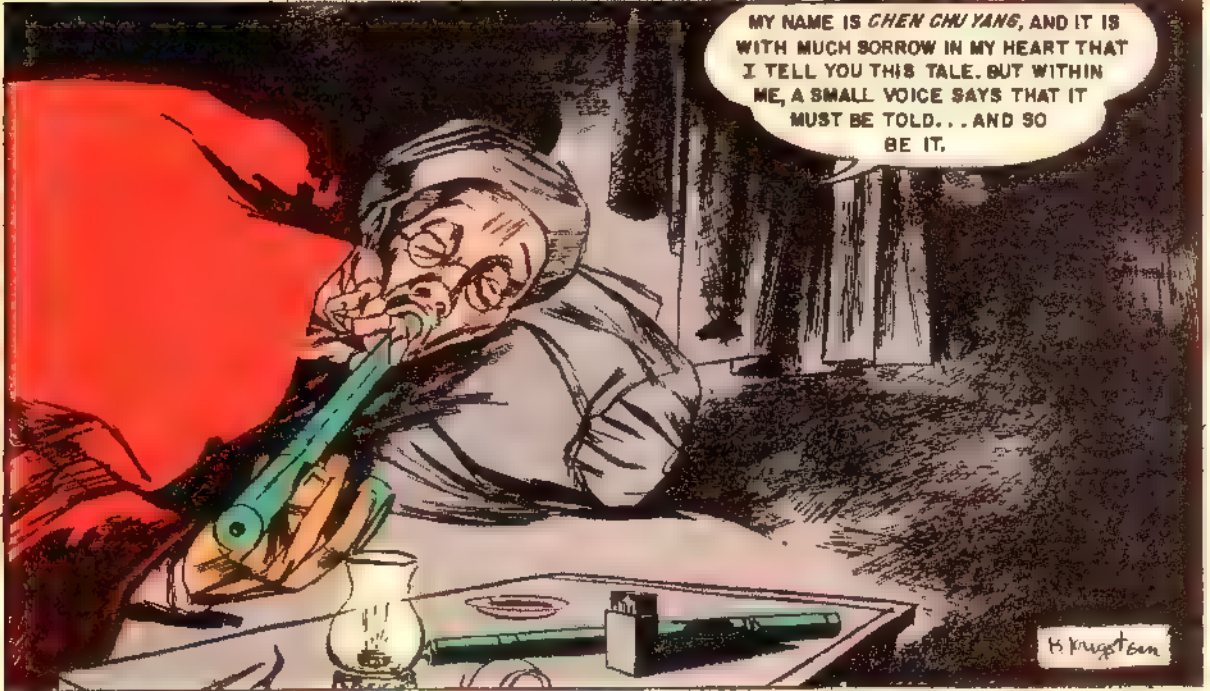
The Vault-Keeper
Room 706, Dept Money
225 Lafayette St
N Y 12, N Y

THE DEN WAS QUIET. THE FRAGRANT ODOR OF OPIUM FLOATED TO THE CEILING AND LIKE A HEAVY CURTAIN IT DEADENED THE CHINATOWN STREET NOISES, PUSHED THEM FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY TO THE REALM OF THE UNREAL... AND THE SMOKERS LAY MOTIONLESS, REVELING IN THEIR OWN FANCIFUL WORLD OF DREAMS. LISTEN NOW AS *CHEN CHU YANG* TELLS YOU HIS STORY IN HIS OWN WORDS. IT'S ENTITLED...

PIPE-DREAM



MY NAME IS *CHEN CHU YANG*, AND IT IS WITH MUCH SORROW IN MY HEART THAT I TELL YOU THIS TALE. BUT WITHIN ME, A SMALL VOICE SAYS THAT IT MUST BE TOLD... AND SO BE IT.

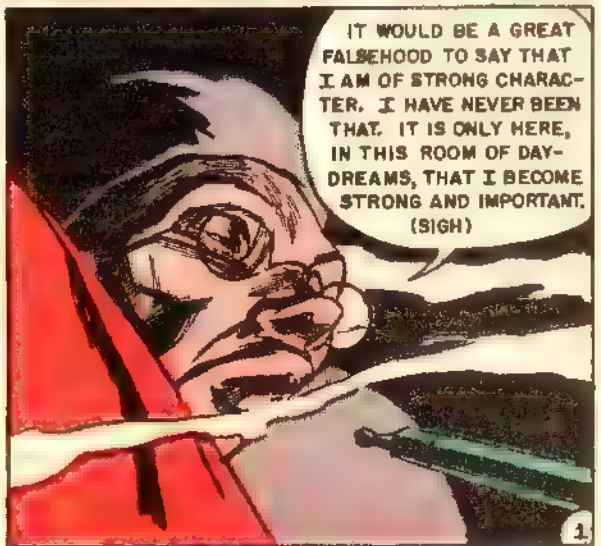


Krugstein

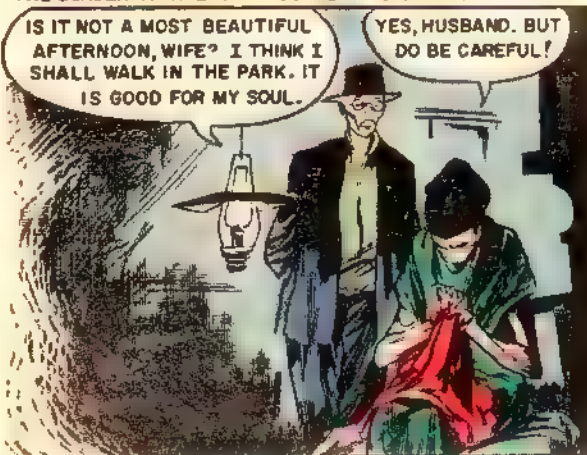
PLEASE DO NOT THINK ILL OF ME FOR FREQUENTING SUCH A PLACE AS THIS, BUT INSTEAD, BE KINDLY AND... AND UNDERSTANDING, FOR MY GRIEF IS GREAT. I HAVE BEEN VISITING HERE FOR MANY YEARS. IT IS MY ONLY SOLACE... AND FOR A KINDLY OLD MAN SUCH AS I WITH BUT FEW YEARS TO WAIT, IT IS HARMLESS ENOUGH. IS IT NOT?



IT WOULD BE A GREAT FALSEHOOD TO SAY THAT I AM OF STRONG CHARACTER. I HAVE NEVER BEEN THAT. IT IS ONLY HERE, IN THIS ROOM OF DAY-DREAMS, THAT I BECOME STRONG AND IMPORTANT. (SIGH)



"MY STORY GOES BACK PERHAPS A DOZEN SUMMERS. MY WIFE WAS A GOOD WOMAN... A **STRONG** WOMAN. SHE BORE THE BURDEN THAT I WAS TOO WEAK TO CARRY."



IS IT NOT A MOST BEAUTIFUL AFTERNOON, WIFE? I THINK I SHALL WALK IN THE PARK. IT IS GOOD FOR MY SOUL.

YES, HUSBAND. BUT DO BE CAREFUL!

"SUCH A **GOOD** WOMAN. NEVER CAN I RECALL A WORD OF COMPLAINT FROM HER... EVEN THOUGH SHE BUT KNEW IT WAS NOT TO THE PARK I WALKED... BUT TO THIS HOUSE OF DREAMS. I REMEMBER WELL HOW I CHIDED MYSELF THAT BLACK DAY... UNTIL MY BRAIN WAS LULLED."



"NEVER BEFORE THAT DAY HAD MY DREAMS CONCERNED MY GOOD WIFE. BUT I WAS FILLED TO OVERFLOWING WITH LOVE FOR HER... AND IT WAS BEYOND MY CONTROL..."



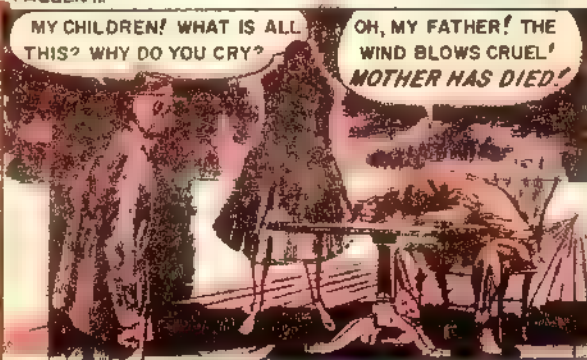
"I DREAMED OF HER WONDROUS FAITH AND DEVOTION TO MYSELF AND OUR CHILDREN... AND FOR NO REASON, I DREAMED OF THE SADNESS THAT WOULD BE MINE, WERE SHE TO DIE..."



"IN GREAT DETAIL I DREAMED THE BIRDS WOULD NOT SING, AND THE FLOWERS WOULD BOW THEIR FRAGRANT HEADS TO JOIN ME IN MY SORROW..."



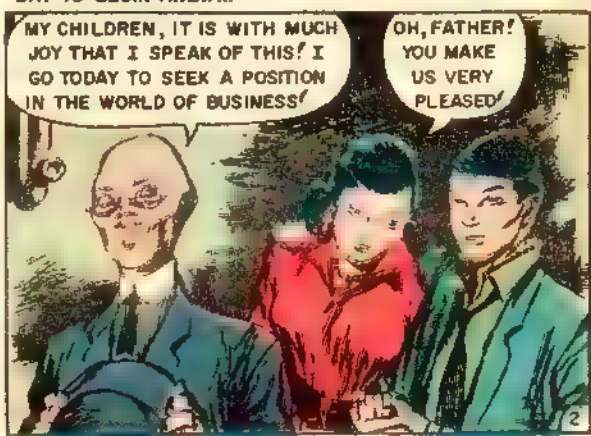
"AI! IT HAD INDEED BEEN A SAD DREAM, BUT IT HAD MADE ME KEENLY AWARE THAT I WAS A FORTUNATE MAN. A **VERY** FORTUNATE MAN TO POSSESS SUCH A TREASURE! AND I HAD RETURNED HOME WITH A LIGHTNESS OF HEART THAT WAS MOST PLEASING. BUT IT PROVED TO BE A BLACK DAY... FOR THE FIRST OF MY GREAT SORROWS HAD FALLEN..."



MY CHILDREN! WHAT IS ALL THIS? WHY DO YOU CRY?

OH, MY FATHER! THE WIND BLOWS CRUEL! MOTHER HAS DIED!

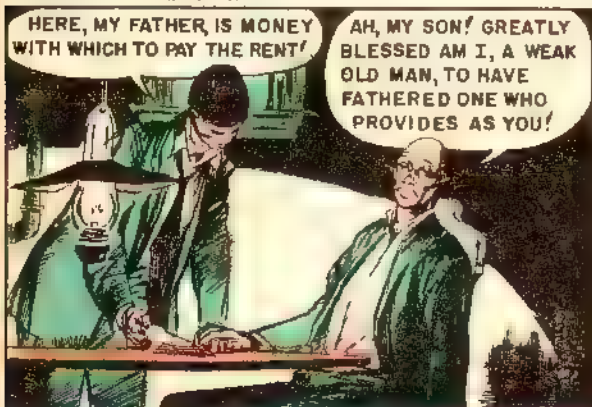
"HAD I NOT REASON TO GRIEVE? WHAT WAS TO BECOME OF US? I WAS AWARE OF MY DUTY TO MY TWO CHILDREN. OH YES! AND BY THE BEARD OF MY SIRE, I VOWED THAT DAY TO BEGIN ANEW..."



MY CHILDREN, IT IS WITH MUCH JOY THAT I SPEAK OF THIS! I GO TODAY TO SEEK A POSITION IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS!

OH, FATHER! YOU MAKE US VERY PLEASED!

"AH, BUT IT IS SAD. MY SO HONORABLE INTENTIONS
FADED LIKE SMOKE BEFORE THE WIND. AND WERE IT
NOT FOR THE EFFORTS OF MY SON, WE WOULD NOT
HAVE HAD FOOD IN OUR MOUTHS, NOR EVEN A ROOF
ABOVE OUR HEADS..."



"BUT AGAIN, MY GLADNESS WAS SHORT-LIVED. THE WAR
WAS CALLING FOR MEN... AND MY SON WAS NO EXCEPTION"



"THAT NIGHT I VISITED THIS PLACE.
IN MY HEART I CRIED FOR MY SON
WHO WOULD LEAVE US... AND SO
DID I CRY IN MY SMOKE DREAMS..."



"I SAW IN MY DREAMS THE ANGUISH
THROUGH WHICH HE MUST PASS,
THE HAUNTING FEAR WHICH I KNEW
WOULD CROWD HIS EVERY HOUR..."



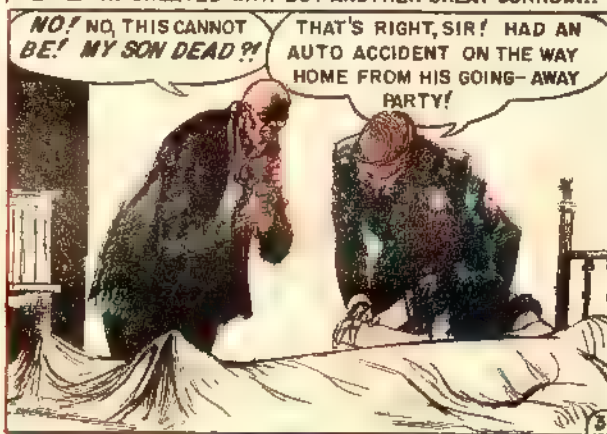
"I SAW THE FACE OF THE ENEMY! I
FELT THE IMPACT OF SHELLS EXPLOD-
ING, SAW THE GREAT BLOODSHED..."



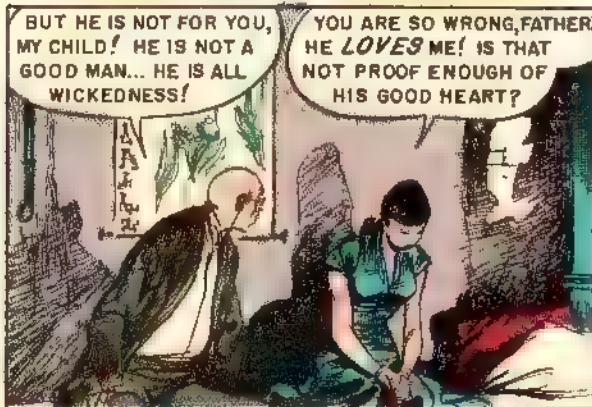
"...AND I DREAMED MY ONLY SON WOULD DIE..."



"(SIGH) THE HOUR WAS LATE WHEN I ARRIVED HOME. I
HAD PLEDGED MYSELF TO CARE FOR MY DAUGHTER IN MY
SON'S ABSENCE. *THIS* TIME, SURELY, I WOULD NOT FAIL!
YET I WAS GREETED WITH BUT ANOTHER GREAT SORROW..."



"THE GODS WERE SURELY PUNISHING ME FOR MY LACK OF HONOR! AMENDS WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE BY MY HUMBLE BEING TO ATONE FOR THE MISFORTUNES I HAVE CAUSED. AT ALL COSTS I HAD TO PROTECT AND CHERISH THE WELFARE OF MY TREASURED DAUGHTER..."



BUT HE IS NOT FOR YOU, MY CHILD! HE IS NOT A GOOD MAN... HE IS ALL WICKEDNESS!

YOU ARE SO WRONG, FATHER! HE *LOVES* ME! IS THAT NOT PROOF ENOUGH OF HIS GOOD HEART?

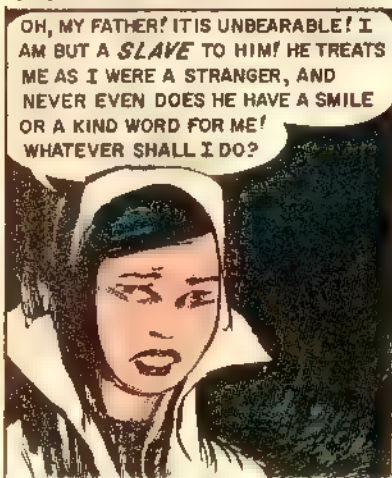
"YEA, THOUGH I TRIED WITH ALL MY POWER TO CONVINCE MY DAUGHTER OF HER FOLLY, I WENT UNHEARD... FOR NO MAN ON THE EARTH CAN SPEAK LOUD ENOUGH FOR A GIRL TO HEAR WHEN HER HEAD IS IN THE CLOUDS. IS IT NOT SO?"



AH... NOW MY BRIGHTEST JEWEL HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM ME! I WISH GLADNESS FOREVER, MY DAUGHTER, MAY YOUR JOY INCREASE A THOUSAND FOLD!

THANK YOU, MY FATHER! THIS IS INDEED THE HAPPIEST MOMENT IN MY LIFE. I SHALL HAVE NO REGRETS!

"BUT SHE HAD REGRETS. IN THE SPAN OF SIX MONTHS THERE WERE MANY."



OH, MY FATHER! IT IS UNBEARABLE! I AM BUT A *SLAVE* TO HIM! HE TREATS ME AS I WERE A STRANGER, AND NEVER EVEN DOES HE HAVE A SMILE OR A KIND WORD FOR ME! WHATEVER SHALL I DO?

THERE IS NOTHING YOU MUST DO, MY CHILD. IT IS TOO LATE. YOU HAVE A HUSBAND AND YOU MUST REMAIN WITH HIM!



BUT, FATHER! HE IS CRUEL! SEE? THESE BRUISES? HE HAS STRUCK ME MANY TIMES!

IT IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE. YOU ARE A GIRL OF CHINA, AND MY DAUGHTER. YOU MUST DO NOTHING TO BRING A DISGRACE UPON US! YOU HAVE TAKEN A VOW TO BE WITH THE MAN OF YOUR CHOICE. YOU CANNOT RETRACE THE PATH YOU YOURSELF HAVE MADE!



TRUE, IT WILL BE A DIFFICULT TASK. BUT THERE IS NO OTHER COURSE THAT, WITH HONOR, YOU COULD TAKE! I GRIEVE DEEPLY BUT... IT STILL DOES NOT CHANGE! YOU CAN ONLY BE FREE WHEN HE IS DEAD!



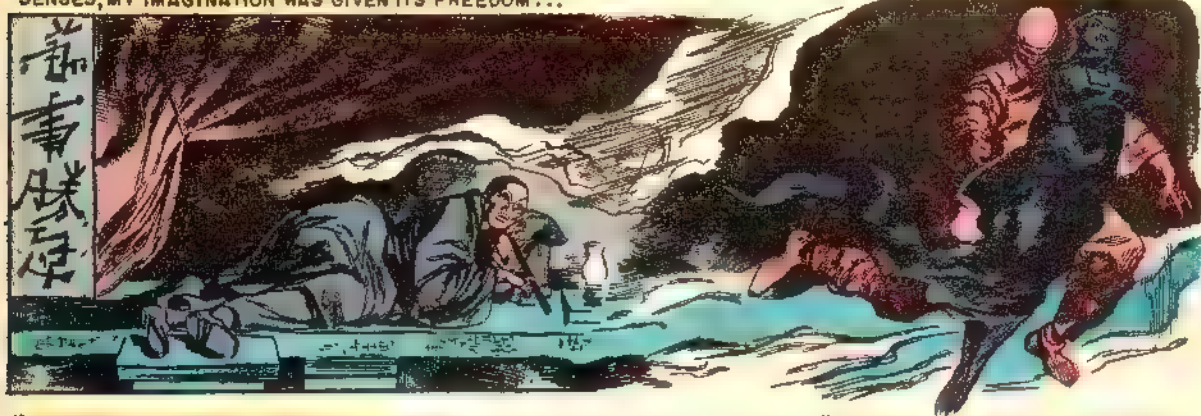
(SIGH) YES, MY FATHER! YOUR WORDS ARE WISE AND TRUE! I MUST DO NOTHING! I MUST RESIGN MYSELF TO MY FATE!

"I HAD WATCHED, TEARS WETTING MY CHEEKS, AS SHE HAD SLOWLY WALKED FROM ME, TO RETURN TO HER MASTER. DID IT NOT SEEM UNFAIR THAT ONE SO YOUNG, SO FAIR, SHOULD SUFFER SO? IT WAS THEN THAT I KNEW I HAD TO ASSERT MYSELF TO RELIEVE MY DAUGHTER OF HER MISERY..."



"SURELY *SOMETHING* HAD TO BE DONE! THE GODS HAD GIVEN ME THIS CHANCE SO THAT I MIGHT REDEEM MYSELF! BUT *WHAT* COULD I, A WEAK OLD MAN, DO? IN MY WORRY, I HAD VISITED THIS ROOM OF ENCHANTMENT, AND AS THE AROMATIC VAPORS STUPEFIED MY SENSES, MY IMAGINATION WAS GIVEN ITS FREEDOM..."

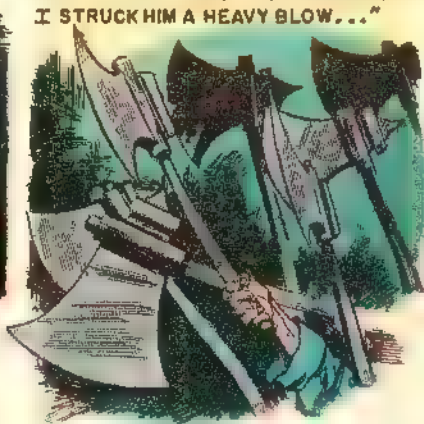
"AH, THIS DREAM I WELL REMEMBER. I DREAMED THAT I WAS STRONG AND BRAVE. I DREAMED OF MY DAUGHTER'S SADNESS, OF HER YOUTH THAT WOULD WITHER AS THE AUTUMN LEAF, OF HER TEARS THAT FLOWED LIKE THE RIVER FROM EYES FILLED WITH DISILLUSION..."



"IN MY DREAM I ARGUED IMPORTANTLY WITH HER MATE. I SAW THE VICIOUS EYES, THE LIPS CURLED IN WRATH, AND I WAS NOT AFRAID..."

"...FOR I HAD THE LION'S HEART! AND WHEN TO HIS SURPRISE, HE SAW HIS WORDS WERE USELESS, WE STRUGGLED MIGHTILY..."

"...AND HIS YOUTHFUL STRENGTH WAS PUT TO ITS GREATEST TEST! IN THE FURY THERE SUDDENLY APPEARED IN MY HAND A HUGE AXE WITH WHICH I STRUCK HIM A HEAVY BLOW..."

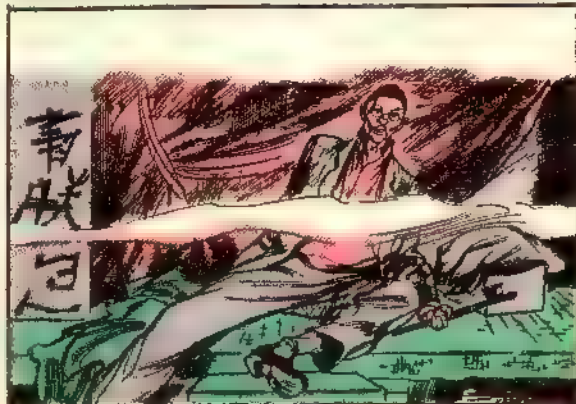


"I SHUDDER NOW TO RECALL HOW HE HAD FALLEN TO THE FLOOR, GUSHING RED, AND HOW I, IN MY ANGER, SMOTE HIM A DOZEN MORE TIMES TILL THERE WAS BUT LITTLE LEFT OF HIM FOR ONE TO VIEW..."

"BEYOND DOUBT, HE WAS DEAD. AND MY HEART REJOICED TO KNOW THAT MY DAUGHTER'S SHACKLES HAD BEEN SEVERED, THAT SHE WAS FREE AS THE STARS THAT ONCE AGAIN SPARKLED LIKE GEMS IN HER EYES! ALL THIS I HAD ACCOMPLISHED... AND I WAS A HERO..."



"WHEN I RETURNED FROM THE NEBULOUS WORLD, I WAS GREATLY AGITATED. TO BE SURE, IT WAS AN EXCELLENT DAY-DREAM, BUT SUDDENLY MY TWO GREAT SORROWS OCCURRED TO ME! AND I RECALLED THAT BEFORE THE DEATH OF MY WIFE, I *HAD DREAMED HER DEAD*."



"AND I RECALLED THAT BEFORE THE DEATH OF MY ONLY SON...I HAD DREAMED *HIM DEAD*! COULD MY DREAMS POSSIBLY BE *MORE* THAN MERE FANCIES? COULD THE GREAT GODS WORK IN SUCH A MANNER TO AWAKEN ME TO MY TRUE SELF? YOU CAN EASILY SEE MY EXCITEMENT! I HAD TO KNOW IF I WERE RIGHT! WITH MUCH HASTE I HURRIED TO MY DAUGHTER..."



"AND, *LO!* WHEN I ARRIVED, THERE WERE POLICEMEN AND CROWDS ALL BUSTLING AND EXCITED..."



MY DAUGHTER, YOU CRY! TELL ME WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED HERE?

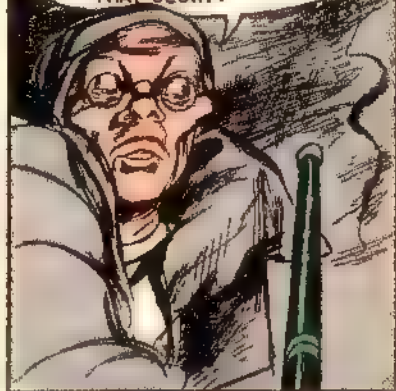
MY HUSBAND HAS BEEN KILLED, MY FATHER! I DO NOT KNOW BY WHOM!

SURELY THEN, YOU SHOULD BE JOYFUL! NO ONE GRIEVES AT THE PASSING OF A WICKED SOUL... AND YOU ARE *FREE!* AND I HAVE AT LAST EMERGED TO FIND THE SUCCESS AND IMPORTANCE THAT DESTINY HAD PLANNED FOR ME!

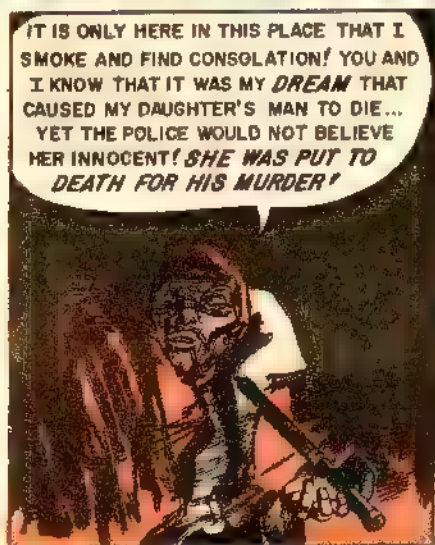


YES, MY FATHER!

AH, YES... THAT WAS MANY YEARS AGO. WHY AM I *HERE*, YOU ASK? WHERE IS THE SUCCESS AND IMPORTANCE I WAS TO RECEIVE, YOU ASK? (SIGH) NEVER SHALL I OBTAIN THAT GLORY!



IT IS ONLY HERE IN THIS PLACE THAT I SMOKE AND FIND CONSOLATION! YOU AND I KNOW THAT IT WAS MY *DREAM* THAT CAUSED MY DAUGHTER'S MAN TO DIE... YET THE POLICE WOULD NOT BELIEVE HER INNOCENT! *SHE WAS PUT TO DEATH FOR HIS MURDER!*



(SIGH)
AH, WELL... IT IS TIME FOR ANOTHER DREAM... IS IT NOT?



HEH, HEH! GUESS *CHEN CHU YANG* WAS ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO NEVER DO *ANYTHING* RIGHT! BUT WHO CAN SAY... MAYBE DREAMS *CAN* COME TRUE, EH? BUT IF THAT'S SO, *MARILYN MONROE* IS GONNA BE ONE BUSY GIRL! WELL, THE *OLD WITCH* IS NOW AWAITING YOU WITH HER *SCROUNGY SLOP*, SO, 'BYE!

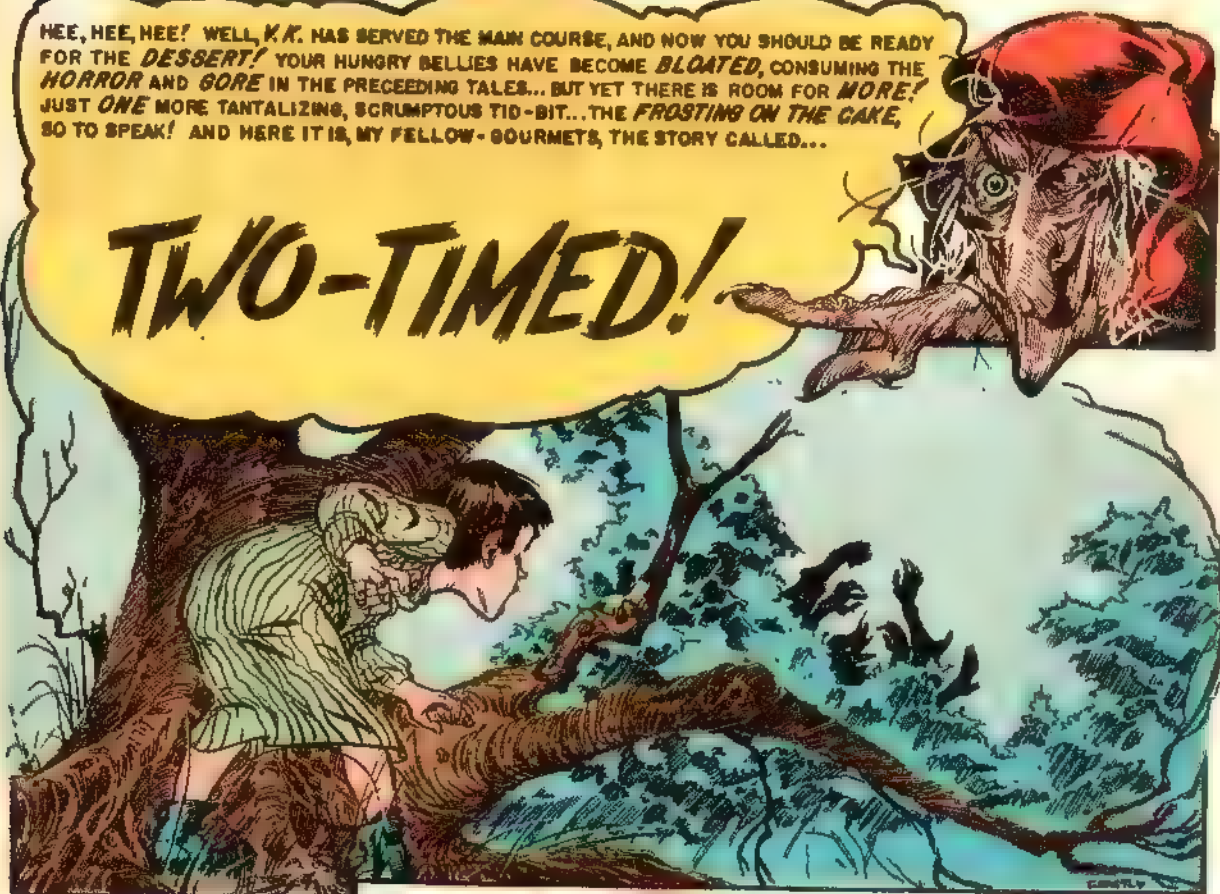


THE END

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE, HEE, HEE! WELL, K.K. HAS SERVED THE MAIN COURSE, AND NOW YOU SHOULD BE READY FOR THE *DESSERT!* YOUR HUNGRY BELLIES HAVE BECOME *BLOATED*, CONSUMING THE *HORROR* AND *GORE* IN THE PRECEEDING TALES... BUT YET THERE IS ROOM FOR *MORE!* JUST *ONE* MORE TANTALIZING, SCRUMPTIOUS TID-BIT... THE *FROSTING ON THE CAKE*, SO TO SPEAK! AND HERE IT IS, MY FELLOW-GOURMETS, THE STORY CALLED...

TWO-TIMED!



IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY... 1900! THE WOODEN FRAME HOUSE NESTLED COZILY IN THE CENTER OF A MYRIAD OF TREES, QUIETLY SLEEPING UNDER THE WATCHFUL, WINKING STARS.

BUT INSIDE, ON HIS BED, TEN YEAR OLD DICKIE TOSSED RESTLESSLY, STRAINING TO HEAR THE FAMILIAR SOUND.

AND SUDDENLY HE HEARD IT.



THE CLIP-CLOPPING OF THE HORSE AND BUGGY STOPPED IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE... AND PUZZLED, HE HEARD IT START UP AGAIN AND MOVE OFF DOWN THE ROAD...



THAT'S FUNNY! I WAS SURE THAT WAS MOM AND DAD COMING HOME! WHO ELSE COULD IT HAVE BEEN?

THEIR HOUSE WAS DESOLATELY FAR FROM ANY NEIGHBORS, AND AS HE HUDDLED IN THOUGHT, HE HEARD UNFAMILIAR, ANGRY VOICES FROM OUTSIDE. HE COULDN'T MAKE OUT THE WORDS...



HOLY COW! SOMEBODY'S HAVING AN ANFUL ARGUMENT OUT THERE!

HIS YOUTHFUL CURIOSITY AROUSED, HE LEFT HIS BED, SNEAKED DOWNSTAIRS TO THE PORCH...



THEY'RE OVER THERE... IN THE TREES!

QUIETLY, HE INVADDED THE SHADOWS OF THE TREES, MOVED CAUTIOUSLY TOWARD THE SHOUTING VOICES...

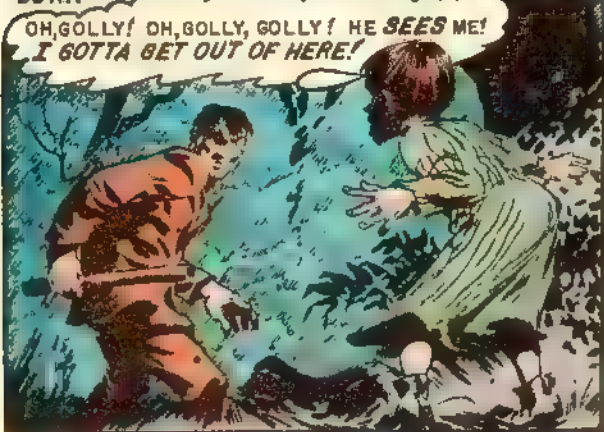


GOLLY! IT'S A MAN AND A WOMAN! AND THEY'RE FIGHTING!

IN THE DIMNESS HE WATCHED THE MAN VICIOUSLY BLUDGEONING THE WOMAN... TOO ENTRANCED BY THE HORROR HE WAS WITNESSING TO CRY OUT...



HE SAW THE WOMAN SLUMP TO THE GROUND, HER SCREAMS TURNING TO MUFFLED, ANGUISHED SOBS. AND THEN WITHOUT REASON, THE MAN SUDDENLY TURNED AND SAW THE BOY...



OH, GOLLY! OH, GOLLY, GOLLY! HE SEES ME! I GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE!

HE WANTED TO RUN... HE WANTED TO SCREAM FOR HELP, BUT HE COULDN'T! HIS FEET WERE ROOTED TO THE GROUND AS STRONGLY AS THE TREES SURROUNDING HIM! THE MAN WAS ON HIM IN AN INSTANT, HIS POWERFUL HANDS DIGGING GRUFFLY INTO HIS ARMS...



HELP!

THE MAN'S HANDS SNAPPED CRUELLY AROUND THE BOY'S NECK, EXERTING A TREMENDOUS PRESSURE THAT MADE HIS BLOOD SLAM THROUGH HIS HEAD, FORCED HIS EYES TO BULGE GROTESQUELY FROM THEIR SOCKETS!



AND AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD STARTED, IT ENDED! THE MAN RELEASED HIS GRASP, AND THE BOY, MIND SWIRLING BLACKLY, CRUMPLED SLOWLY TO THE GROUND...



THE BOY REMAINED, SPRAWLED ON THE SOFT EARTH, A THROBBING PAIN IN HIS BRAIN, AND BEFORE HE DROPPED OFF INTO A BLACK VOID HE HEARD THE SHOT!



HE AWOKE TO FIND HIS PARENTS BENDING WORRIEDLY OVER HIM...



ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, SON? YOU GAVE US QUITE A FRIGHT!

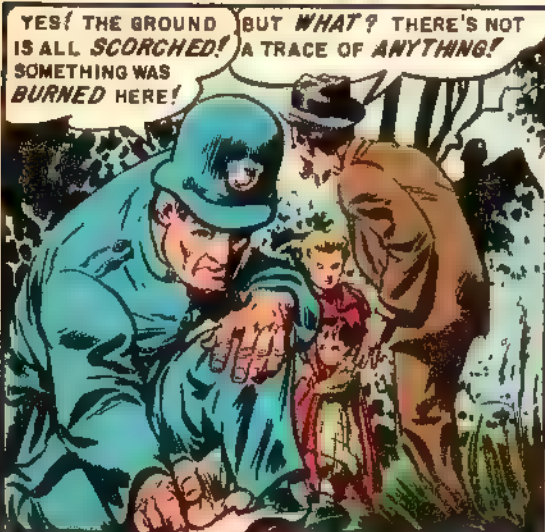
WHEN WE DIDN'T FIND YOU IN BED, WE CALLED CONSTABLE PHYFE! WHAT HAPPENED?

HE TOLD THEM AS BEST HE COULD, FRIGHTENED AND TEARFUL, AND THEY LISTENED, WHEN HE HAD FINISHED...



UNBELIEVABLE! ARE YOU SURE HE WASN'T DREAMING?

NOT WITH THOSE BRUISES ON HIS NECK! AND THAT SMOKE! SMELL IT?



YES! THE GROUND IS ALL SCORCHED! SOMETHING WAS BURNED HERE!

BUT WHAT? THERE'S NOT A TRACE OF ANYTHING!



THIS CERTAINLY IS STRANGE! I HOPE YOU FIND THE MAN WHO DID THIS! OUR BOY WAS ALMOST KILLED!

OH, WE'LL FIND HIM, MA'AM! I'LL START AN INVESTIGATION RIGHT AWAY!

HEE, HEE! WELL, CONSTABLE PHYFE DID INVESTIGATE, BUT OF COURSE, HE WAS NEVER ABLE TO *SOLVE* THE STRANGE MYSTERY. GRADUALLY IT WAS FORGOTTEN, AND TOMMY GREW UP TO MARRY A STINKIN' LITTLE *TWO-TIMER* WHO MADE HIM MISERABLE BY KEEPING A LOVER ON THE SIDE!



ONE NIGHT WHEN HIS WIFE THOUGHT HE WOULD BE WORKING LATE.

SURE I WANT TO GET RID OF MY HUSBAND, HONEY! BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO GET ME THE GUN!

WHY THAT CHEAP LITTLE SHE WANTS TO KILL ME!



BUT HIS OWN MURDER WAS ONE THING HE WOULD NEVER ALLOW. SECRETLY HE MADE HIS OWN PLANS TO KILL HER *FIRST!*

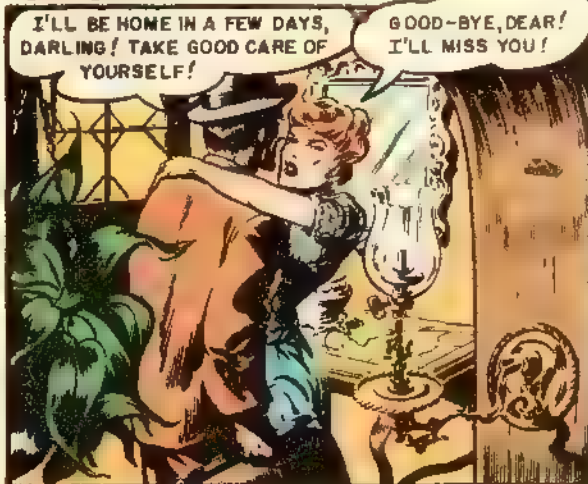
LET'S SEE... 7:30, LEAVE HOUSE! 8:30, RETURN TO HOUSE! 9:00, GET ALL THINGS IN READINESS... HMM... YES. YES, I'M ALL SET!



A FEW DAYS LATER HE LEFT ON "AN IMPORTANT BUSINESS TRIP" TO THE CITY...

I'LL BE HOME IN A FEW DAYS, DARLING! TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF!

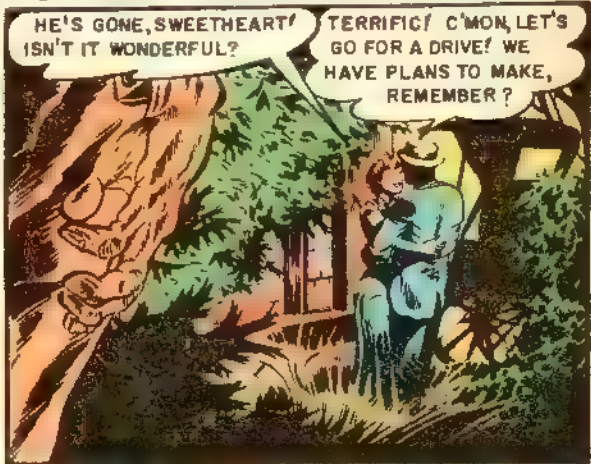
GOOD-BYE, DEAR! I'LL MISS YOU!



AS SOON AS HE WAS OUT OF SIGHT, HE HID THE BUGGY IN A CLUMP OF TREES AND DOUBLED BACK TO THE HOUSE JUST IN TIME TO SEE HIS WIFE MEET HER LOVER!

HE'S GONE, SWEETHEART! ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?

TERRIFIC! C'MON, LET'S GO FOR A DRIVE! WE HAVE PLANS TO MAKE, REMEMBER?



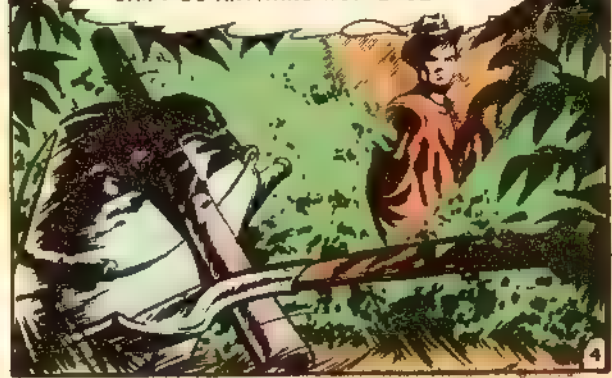
HE WATCHED AS THEY SNUGGLED TOGETHER IN THE BUGGY, WAITED TILL THEY HAD DRIVEN OUT OF SIGHT BEFORE HE ENTERED THE HOUSE AND MADE HIS WAY TO THE CELLAR...

THEY PROBABLY WON'T BE BACK FOR A WHILE, BUT I CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES! WHERE'S THAT SHOVEL?



HE TOOK A SHOVEL, A LEAD PIPE AND A CAN OF KEROSENE FROM THE CELLAR, BROUGHT THEM OUTSIDE AND STASHED THEM DEEP IN THE TREES...

THERE! EVERYTHING'S READY! AS LONG AS NOTHING HAPPENS TO THROW ME OFF SCHEDULE, I'M SAFE! WELL... CAN'T DO ANYTHING NOW EXCEPT WAIT!



SEVERAL HOURS PASSED BEFORE HE HEARD THE BUGGY PULL TO A STOP...



AH! THEY'RE BACK! LOOK AT HER KISS HIM GOOD-NIGHT!

MOMENTS LATER, THE BUGGY RATTLED AWAY AND HIS WIFE BEGAN THE WALK TO THE HOUSE. IT WAS THEN HE STEPPED FROM THE TREES TO CONFRONT HER...



TOM! YES, IT'S ME, YOU DIRTY DOUBLE-CROSSER!



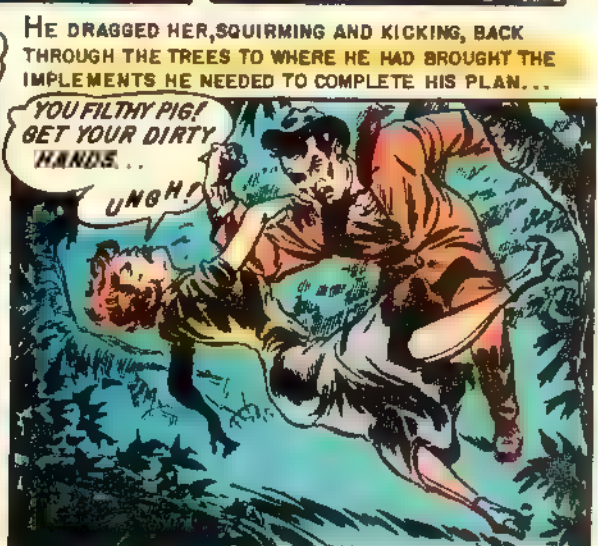
WHA...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I I THOUGHT.

I KNOW WHAT YOU THOUGHT! YOU THOUGHT I'D STILL BE IN THE CITY!



NO...NO, OF COURSE NOT! I... WHAT ARE YOU DOING? LET GO OF ME!

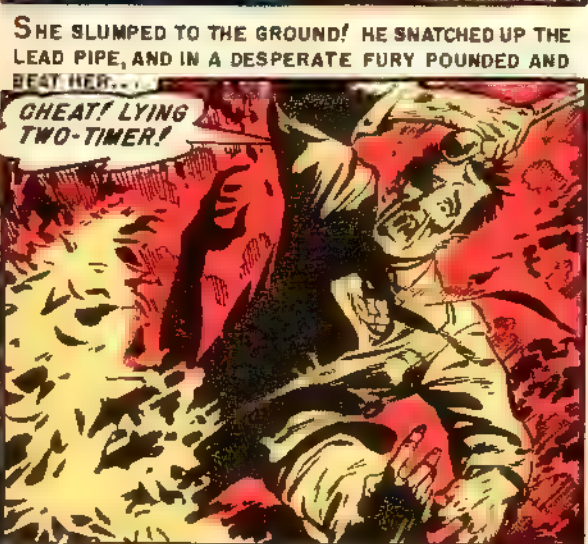
NOT THIS TIME! I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE!



HE DRAGGED HER, SQUIRMING AND KICKING, BACK THROUGH THE TREES TO WHERE HE HAD BROUGHT THE IMPLEMENTS HE NEEDED TO COMPLETE HIS PLAN...

YOU FILTHY PIG! GET YOUR DIRTY HANDS...

UNGH!



SHE SLUMPED TO THE GROUND! HE SNATCHED UP THE LEAD PIPE, AND IN A DESPERATE FURY POUNDED AND BEAT HER...

CHEAT! LYING TWO-TIMER!



SUDDENLY, WITHOUT REASON, HE TURNED! THERE IN THE DARKNESS HE SAW A BOY, EYES WIDE WITH FRIGHT, IMMOBILE WITH HORROR... WATCHING!

GREAT BLAZES! THE KID SAW EVERYTHING!

IN AN INSTANT HE WAS UPON THE BOY! HIS HANDS SNAPPED CRUELLY AROUND THE BOY'S NECK, EXERTING A TREMENDOUS PRESSURE THAT MADE THE BLOOD SLAM THROUGH THE YOUNGSTER'S HEAD, FORCED THE EYES TO BULGE GROTESQUELY FROM THEIR SOCKETS...



THEN SUDDENLY, A GLIMMER OF REMEMBRANCE AND RECOGNITION FLASHED ACROSS THE MAN'S FACE! HE STOPPED... HIS FINGERS LESSENERED THEIR GRIP!



HIS GRASP RELAXED AND THE BOY SLUMPED SLOWLY TO THE GROUND...

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO WHEN I SAW THIS HAPPEN... THERE WAS A SHOT! THAT MEANS...

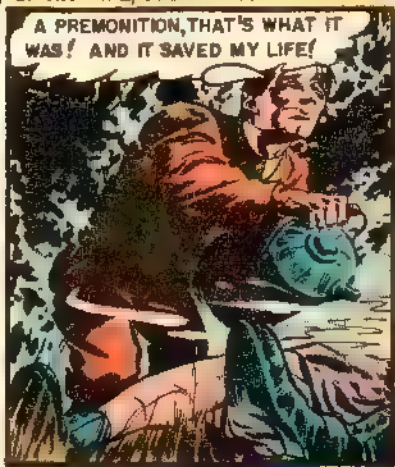


SWIFTLY, HE RUSHED TO HIS WIFE, SEARCHED HER POCKETS UNTIL...

AH! I'VE FOUND IT! THE GUN! NOW SHE CAN'T SHOOT ME! HA HA! HA HA HA HA HA!

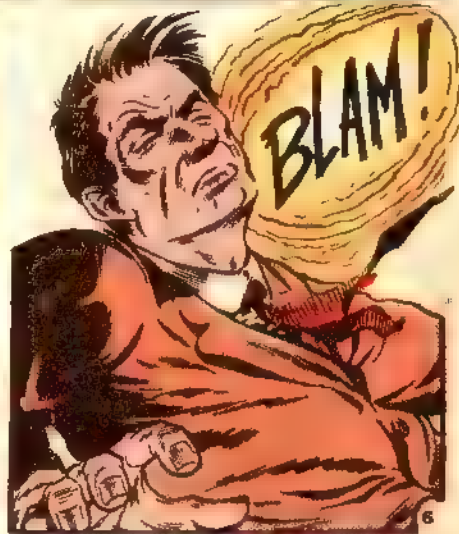


HE STUMBLED TO THE KEROSENE, SPILLED IT OVER THE INERT FORM OF HIS WIFE, GLOATING...



CHUCKLING TO HIMSELF, HE STRUCK A MATCH, DROPPED IT ON THE KEROSENE SOAKED BODY! WITH A ROAR OF FLAME IT IGNITED...

HA HA! A PREMONITION! LET'S SEE YOU SHOOT ME NOW, BABY! HA HA HA! SHOOT ME NOW!



HE STAGGERED, THE KEROSENE SLOSHING OVER HIM, AND THEN HE FELL... ON HIS BURNING WIFE'S BODY!

CONSTABLE PHYFE RACED TO THE BLAZING PYRE, FLAILED WILDLY WITH HIS COAT TO SMOTHER THE FLAMES, TO PULL THE BODIES APART...



FINALLY THE FLAMES WERE OUT AND THE CONSTABLE SAT CROUCHING BY THE CHARRED, DYING MAN...

... SORRY I COULDN'T GET HERE A BIT SOONER, BOY. MAYBE NONE O' THIS WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF I HAD!



LEASTWISE, I KNOW NOW WHY WE ALL SMELLED SMOKE FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! ALWAYS FELT THERE WAS SOMETHING MIGHTY CURIOUS 'BOUT THAT STORY YOU TOLD US THEN!



I NEVER WAS CERTAIN, MIND YOU, AND THROUGH THE YEARS I KINDA FORGOT ABOUT IT...UNTIL TONIGHT! SO I FIGURED I'D BEST GET OVER HERE...JUST TO MAKE SURE!



BUT...(GASP) I DIDN'T... KNOW...EITHER UNTIL... TONIGHT (GASP) HOW... HOW DID YOU..?

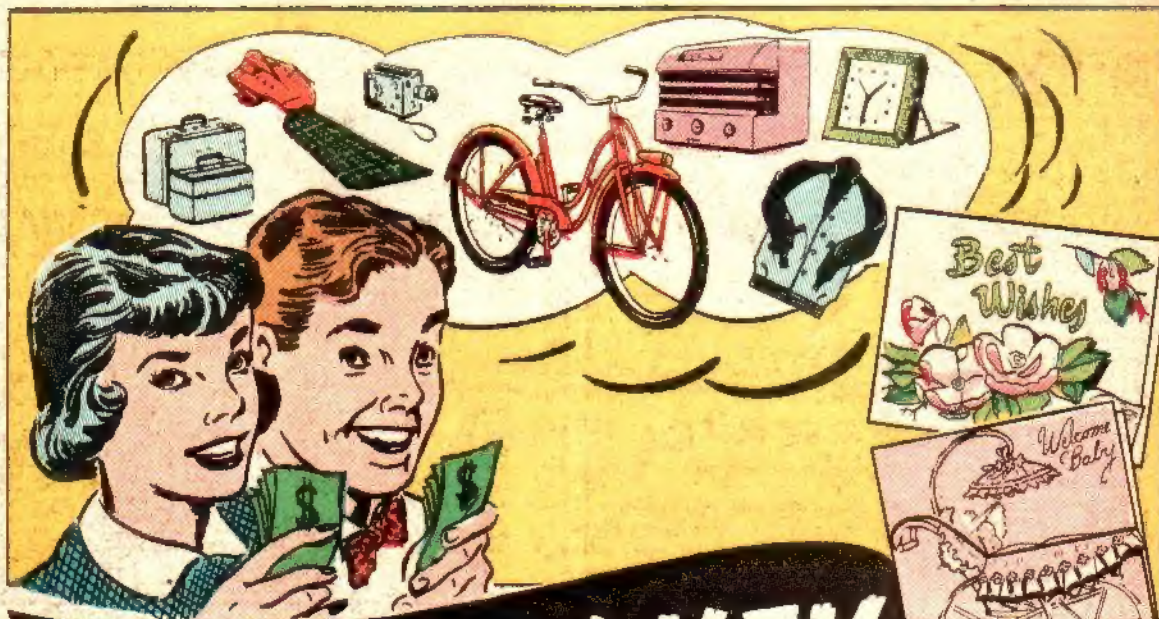
WELL...IT ALL STARTED WITH A SCRAP OF PAPER! JUST A SCRAP THAT I HAPPENED TO FIND BY YOUR BODY THAT NIGHT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! IT GOT ME TO WONDERING... BECAUSE IT HAD TODAY'S DATE ON IT!



HEE, HEE! DON'T ASK ME! YOU FIGURE IT OUT! POOR TOM THOUGHT HE COULD CHANGE THE COURSE OF DESTINY BUT HE FOUND OUT THE HARD WAY THAT YOU CAN'T FOUL THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE! ANYWAY, UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN IN MY MAG, THE HAUNT OF FEAR, THIS IS THE OLD WITCH SAYING 'BYE. DON'T FORGET TO KEEP YOUR SPIRITS UP!



THE END...



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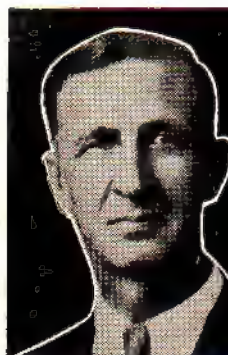
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